

The MYSTERY OF THE ERIK



FITZHUGH GREEN

THE MYSTERY
OF THE ERIK



HE TOOK CAREFUL AIM AT THE BEAR'S HEAD AND PULLED THE TRIGGER

• [Page 74]

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

BY

FITZHUGH GREEN

AUTHOR OF "CLEAR THE DECKS," "ARCTIC DUTY,"
"WON FOR THE FLEET," ETC.



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SHIP	I
II. BOUND NORTH	9
III. ICE!	20
IV. THE MIDNIGHT SUN	28
V. ESKIMOS	36
VI. THE POLE STAR	46
VII. ABANDONED!	56
VIII. BEARS!	66
IX. TREACHERY	76
X. NO ESCAPE	85
XI. RUDD WINS	97
XII. SUSPENSE	106
XIII. NO HOPE!	115
XIV. MORE MYSTERY	126
XV. THE WRECK	136
XVI. NORMAN'S PRISON	146
XVII. MUTINY	156
XVIII. CRUSHED IN THE ICE	167
XIX. PIRACY	179
XX. RED MEAT	190
XXI. THE ARCTIC PALL	201

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII. EXCITEMENT	213
XXIII. THE DERELICT	224
XXIV. A DESPERATE CHANCE	236
XXV. THE RACE BEGINS	248
XXVI. MORE SPEED!	260
XXVII. BAFFLED!	274
XXVIII. THE TRUTH AT LAST	280

THE MYSTERY
OF THE ERIK

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

CHAPTER I

THE SHIP

A YELLOW taxicab broke from the traffic jam in front of the Pennsylvania Station and dashed with illegal speed towards the first crosstown street.

“East River dock—Twenty-eighth—ten minutes to go!” came a muffled voice from within the cab.

“Sure!” And the driver jammed on his emergency half a second before a thundering truck cut across his path.

Seven minutes later the taxi swerved into the dock head and rumbled down the uneven planking. A gang of stevedores blocked the way. Beyond them was a tumbled mountain of packing cases, timbers, coils of rope, and other gear. And behind them all lay moored at the end of the dock a small vessel.

The taxi side-stepped, jumped, and honked, and with one last spin of its steering wheel came to a stop opposite the small vessel's gangway.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"That's the *Erik*, ain't it?" shouted the driver.

For answer the taxicab door sprang open. Out tumbled a bulky roll which might have been a sleeping bag, followed by a series of valises and parcels like so many oversized footballs. At the end emerged a stocky red-haired figure, hatless and unmistakably agitated.

"How much?" he asked the driver.

"Five bones," came the prompt answer.

The stocky young man drew himself up. His haste and agitation curiously disappeared. His flushed cheeks became a deep red. His already chunky hands that had been groups of nervous fingers rolled into solid fists, the bulk of a pair of large Irish potatoes.

"Not on your life!" he said slowly.

The driver opened his mouth but he did not speak. The irate lad before him was but a boy. And yet there was the determination and courage of a man in the narrowed blue eyes, the out-thrust chin, the close-shut mouth.

One fist uncurled and dipped into a side pocket.

"Here's a dollar; and thanks for the speed," said the young man quietly. The bluff worked perfectly.

At this moment a kind of booming cough sounded from the ship's rail. It appeared to come out of the throat of a massive white-whiskered man. The cough broke off into speech:

THE SHIP

"Well, you made it I see."

"Certainly did, Captain Pike. Chicago train was late and I thought I'd miss the ship."

"You're not the missing kind, my lad!" And again the Captain broke into his booming cough which was in reality a laugh hoarsened by forty-odd years of North Atlantic gales and choking fog.

Captain Pike was right. Ruddock Winters—commonly known as "Red," "Wintry," or "Rudd"—was the sort that made a habit of seizing every real opportunity that came his way. Though born and brought up in Chicago, he had already made the acquaintance of men and cities from New York to San Francisco.

A certain Uncle Jim Culver had been largely responsible for Rudd's success. While visiting the boy's father some years before, he had jokingly asked:

"Rudd, how would you like me to send you to college?"

At which Rudd had without hesitation jammed on his cap, given his dog's right ear a farewell pull, and replied:

"We've just got time to catch the noon train."

"For where?" gasped the astonished Uncle.

"East," was the laconic answer.

"Well, I'll be eternally jigged!"

But Rudd went and Uncle Jim footed the bill.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

And likewise, at the end of his Junior year, Rudd went east again on Uncle Jim. Only this time he had been forced to argue not only the generous uncle, but his whole family, into approval of his scheme.

A government expedition had been organized to investigate the Northwest Passage; that is to say, the water route around the north end of North America. Captain Roald Amundsen, the famous Norwegian discoverer of the South Pole, had forced his little ship, the *Gjoa*, through this Passage some twenty years before. Since that time America had accumulated a vast merchant marine with a great number of vessels plying between the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts. The Panama Canal made the trip thousands of miles shorter than the old way around Cape Horn. But even now there was such a jam of business in the Canal, and both Seattle and the swiftly growing Alaskan cities demanded such vast quantities of freight, that a short cut around the upper fringe of the continent would mean millions of dollars saved.

Rudd had read of the expedition in the papers. Its prospects of exploring new land and uncharted seas had fired him with a desire to try his hand at exploration. A request to Washington brought only the discouraging reply that he was too young for the work. Though the plans included but a three months' stay in arctic regions, ice and foul weather might



RUDD'S TRACK CHART TO POINT OF MUTINY AND OVER ROUTE OF ESCAPE.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

force the ship to winter north, in which case only the most rugged men could endure the hardship and privation.

“Goodness knows, I’m strong enough,” Rudd had wailed at the ever willing Uncle. “And it’s a chance I’ll never have again!”

So Uncle Jim had sent him to his old friend Captain Pike, skipper of the *Erik*, which had been chartered for the expedition. And Captain Pike, recognizing the value of Rudd’s type, had in turn recommended him to Dr. Barlow, who was in charge of the scientific party. The upshot was a telegram Rudd had received from the Doctor just forty-eight hours before:

Will you accept position as my assistant? *Erik* sails Friday, June twenty. Wire reply.

In exactly one hour Rudd had thrown what camping gear he owned into several bags, dashed to the station and caught the fastest express for New York. He could not sleep for excitement, but lay tossing the whole night in a stuffy berth thinking of polar bears and Eskimos, dogs and walruses, and all the other arctic thrills he long had dreamed about.

And now his dream was at last to come true!

While Captain Pike sent a seaman for the bags Rudd glanced over the vessel that was to be his home for the summer. She was a stumpy, high-bowed

THE SHIP

steamer with one smoke pipe and two masts. The rigging of these masts was unusually heavy for a vessel of her size, and just above the crossstress of each was secured a barrel.

"What's the idea of the barrels?" Rudd asked the seaman.

The man laid down the small trunk he had just hoisted to his shoulder and looked curiously at Rudd.

"Ain't ye never been north afore, sir?" he asked.

His speech and tone were those of a "down easter" as the Grand Bank fishermen call people who live along the coast above Maine.

"Once to Halifax," asserted Rudd.

The seaman shook his head. "They ain't no ice there, sir. Them barrels is for our lookouts when we're in the ice pack." He lifted his hand vaguely. "Great masses an' mountains of ice big as——" he hesitated, "big as 'em!" He pointed to the great office buildings towering along the New York sky line.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Rudd.

"Yessir. And they ain't no way for a little ship like this to get through the floes except as how the lookout tells our helmsman to steer her. And sometimes——" he shook his head and stopped.

"And sometimes what?" asked Rudd after waiting a moment for the man to go on.

He stepped closer and put his mouth to Rudd's

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

ear. "*And sometimes they get crushed!*" he whispered.

Some invisible thing gripped strangely at Rudd's heart. It wasn't fear. It was more a sudden, serious understanding of the perils he would meet on this voyage. He glanced at the blunt bow of the *Erik*, at her staunch and heavy-timbered sides, her powerful masts. She was a bulldog, a fighter, without a doubt.

"And yet—" muttered Rudd. There came to him memories of terrible arctic disasters he had read about: Sir John Franklin, the great Englishman, his ships smashed to kindling by gigantic icebergs, his crews starving and dying, never seen again alive.

The seaman's whispered words rang true:

"And sometimes they get crushed!"

CHAPTER II

BOUND NORTH

DR. BARLOW bustled aboard before Rudd had a chance to go below. He was a tall spare man with a huge nose and a wrinkled leathery skin. All his life he had been leading expeditions to queer parts of the world, and so combined the scholarly bearing of a scientist with the rugged and weathered physique of a mariner.

"Hello, Rudd!" he greeted the boy familiarly. "Looks a mess, doesn't it? But we'll get away this afternoon."

He waved his hand at the littered deck. In fact, very little deck was visible for the great collection of supplies and equipment that were rapidly being swung aboard by the donkey engine.

"Ten thousand pounds of food along," laughed the Doctor. "Might have to winter in Coronation Gulf if we get stuck. And there's that mass of magnetic instruments which are heavier than they look. By the way, I haven't had a chance to find out whether you can do ordinary chart work. Can you?"

"Had a six months' course of it with my trigo-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

nometry," Rudd replied. "But I'm not much on the drawing end."

"Oh, that will all be done in Washington." Dr. Barlow came a little closer to Rudd and lowered his tone. "You see our real task is to collect information. Our figures are worked up by specialists after we return. And while the territory through which we shall pass is part of the Canadian domain, we have agreed to keep quiet on any commercial discoveries we may make."

"You mean there may be gold or——"

"See those timbers," Dr. Barlow rudely interrupted. "We shall make sledges from them in case we winter."

Rudd was startled at this sudden change of tone and subject until he looked up and saw a third man had joined them.

"Ah," said the Doctor, as if he had just noticed the newcomer, "Rudd, I want you to know our First Officer, Mr. Menon."

Never before had Rudd looked into such a face as he saw confronting him. The man himself was of average size and build. His clothing was the rough blue of a down-east merchant sailor. In fact, there was nothing to make one look twice at him until his face was noted. It was the darkest, ugliest, most evil-featured countenance Rudd had ever seen on a man. His nose and chin were large and coarse.

BOUND NORTH

His eyes were black points half hidden by great bushy brows. And the broad, loose slit of his mouth was circled by a long, thin mustache that drooped below his chin on either side and might have been made of horsehair so wiry was it.

"How do you do, Mr. Winters?" said the officer with a bow and ostentatious courtesy which made Rudd suspicious at once.

After he had gone Dr. Barlow again spoke in a low voice.

"Don't ask me why we have such a man aboard, Rudd, because I can't answer the question. After the *Erik* arrived here, Dinger Brothers, from whom we had chartered her, wired that the regular First Officer would be replaced by Mr. Menon. When I saw him I objected strenuously. But Dinger Brothers insisted; and as it was too late to get another vessel I had to accept him. Between you and me we're going to have trouble with the scoundrel before this cruise is over. The worst of it is the men seem to like him."

Here Captain Pike stepped up and announced that all would be ready to cast off at noon.

"Will the tide be right?" queried the Doctor.

"There, there," boomed the old Skipper with a twinkle in his eye. "Now just you let little things like tides and currents alone on this trip. From the amount of instruments and gilguys and gadgets I've

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

seen come aboard my ship, I think you'll have your hands full of science without bothering with how we go or when."

"That's right, Pike," agreed the Doctor. "After that last trip along the Labrador, I'm willing to take your word about anything but weather." And turning to Rudd he added: "The old imbecile doesn't think it's blowing hard till the bower anchor has to be used to hold the helmsman to his wheel!"

"Now, Doctor, you've never seen any real wind," said the Skipper, raising a thick finger for emphasis. "Why, I can remember the time it blew so hard it took ten men to hold a sheepskin over a gimlet hole!"

"Yes, and you also told me about that rain you had off Newfoundland. Let's see, there was a barrel lying on its side by the bridge; and it didn't have any top or bottom in it; and the rain came in faster through the bunghole than it could run out the ends! Wasn't that it, you old liar?"

The Captain went off shaking and booming and coughing until Rudd thought he would explode.

"That's exactly the kind of man for a trip like this," said the Doctor. "Always in good humor; afraid of nothing under heaven; and with a physical strength and courage that breeds a truly respectful fear in the men under him."

Just as the city whistles were blowing for noon

BOUND NORTH

all lines were cast off, the *Erik* stood out under her own steam, and headed up towards Hell Gate.

It was a great moment for Rudd. When would he see his native land again? How would he bear the trials of such a voyage? Where would luxury and comfort next meet him after the confining months aboard the cramped little ship?

These thoughts but flashed across his mind when there came the joyful realization that he was off—off for foreign lands and strange peoples! He took a deep breath of salt air and turned to find some one with whom he could share his great happiness.

He found himself staring into the hideous face of Mr. Menon.

“Very nice to be away, eh?” said the officer, with the same affected politeness that had proved so distasteful to Rudd on their first meeting. “Do you expect soon to come back here?”

Rudd hesitated. He didn’t wish to talk to the man he so instinctively hated. Yet if he were to enjoy the voyage he, like Dr. Barlow, would certainly have to be civil to him.

“Why, yes,” said Rudd slowly. “Yes, of course. I have to be back for my senior year at college next fall.”

“Well, my dear young man, I trust that if you don’t get home for a year or so it won’t make any too great difference.”

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

For a moment Mr. Menon leered at Rudd's amazed look and then turned away.

"What on earth does the ape mean?" Rudd asked himself. "We shan't winter north unless we are forced to. Yet he seems to take trouble for granted."

His first impulse was to tell Dr. Barlow what he had heard. But on second thought he concluded to find out more if possible before adding to the leader's burdens.

The ship touched at Boston long enough to pick up Professor Deal and a young sport named Caverly. The former was to collect arctic plants and animals for the University Museum, and the latter was simply a passenger. His father, the wealthy head of Caverly & Company, famous importers, had contributed to the expedition with the understanding that his son might become a member with no particular duties. Thus young Caverly might have the benefit of a rough trip and at the same time collect valuable information for his father on the fur situation north of Hudson Bay.

As regards the rough trip part of it, Reginald Caverly certainly needed some such treatment. His principal luggage consisted of tinned sweets and cigarettes. His principal idea consisted of more or less contempt for his fellow men. And his chief and only ambition was to convince every one that he

BOUND NORTH

was the cleverest and most original young man in the world.

There were now in the cabin mess Captain Pike, Dr. Barlow, Rudd, Mr. Menon, Professor Deal, and Reginald Caverly. The Second Officer, a young Canadian named Norman, and the old Scotch Chief Engineer ate at such such irregular times that Rudd saw little of them the first few days out.

The last days in June, coal was taken aboard at Sydney, Nova Scotia, and by the morning of July 2 the *Erik* was well on her way across the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Rudd had come on deck for a look about before breakfast. He was still full of the excitement of leaving civilization behind him and yet he had been a little out of luck in the way of companionship. The ship officers had been so busy getting cargo stowed below and the two scientists so engrossed with their plans that Rudd was left much to his own devices. Caverly, of course, was nearly his own age. But that unfortunate young man had been deathly seasick ever since the ship sailed, thereby causing him much personal humiliation.

Rudd found the ship surrounded by a murky fog. At regular intervals the whistle gave a long groan of warning for any ship that might be in the neighborhood to look out. Shrouds dripped and the black smoke rolled overboard, laying a dirty blanket astern.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

He found the bridge was deserted except for helmsman and one officer. The latter stood close to the wheel conversing in low tones with the slickered seaman. As Rudd arrived just as the whistle gave a blast, his presence was not noticed.

"It won't do down here," he heard the officer say. It was Mr. Menon's harsh voice!

"But ain't it dangerous to wait till we get her north?" replied the helmsman.

"Not for us who have had sledging experience. And there are Eskimos at Pons Inlet that would look out for us during the winter."

The helmsman shook his head. "I ain't strong for takin' chances, I ain't. But I guess a man'd do most anything for the price you offer."

"Sure," said Menon, "and haven't I made the deposit you asked for at Sydney? How about the others?"

"Well, there are six out of the seventeen forrude that you can count on. Maybe more later on when Johnson and I have had a chance to talk with them. Aft you know better than I."

Menon shrugged his shoulders. "They're easy enough. Why——"

At that moment he spied Rudd, and nudged the seaman.

"Good morning, Mr. Winters," he said. "We've just been discussing a little entertainment we might

BOUND NORTH

give aboard when the ship gets north—sort of sailor's minstrel, you might say."

Out of the corner of his eye Rudd saw the officer step meaningly on the helmsman's foot. He walked to the end of the bridge without answering their weak attempt to deceive him. Then, realizing the danger of letting Menon know how suspicious he was over what he had just heard, he returned and remarked: "Good idea, Mr. Menon. We need something to cheer us up in weather like this."

Rudd meant to go to Dr. Barlow that very morning and broach the subject of his anxiety about the First Officer's nefarious plans—whatever they might be. But one thing after another prevented. Then, in the late afternoon, after Belle Isle Straits had been passed, the wind freshened and any sort of undisturbed conversation was impossible.

"Little breeze to-night, eh?" remarked Captain Pike, after the Chief Engineer had invited him up to have a look at the sky.

"Yes, sir, and I'm thinking we might lash that lumber on the skids so my smoke pipe guys won't loosen up when the rub comes."

"Right!" agreed the Skipper. "Here, Boatswain, rig for heavy weather."

These preparations were none too soon. The *Erik* was out in the broad Atlantic north of Newfoundland. The whole three-thousand-mile sweep of open

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

sea from Baffin Bay down was a breeding place for gales. Now heavy gusts came out of the northwest and sheets of spray laced up over the bulwarks at every dip of the bow.

By supper time a full gale was blowing. Great combing seas reared mast-high on either hand. The inky water was streaked with froth or riddled by cutting streams of brine shot across it by the terrific wind.

Captain Pike's great hulking figure clung to the bridge rail. "Stand by your sea anchor!" he bawled.

With painful slowness his men struggled on deck below him. An old sail was broken out of its locker and dragged forward. Two spare whaleboat spars and several two-by-fours were finally lashed together to make what looked like a rough dip net. From the net's corners led a bridle of stout lines joined by a metal ring to a heavy hawser, which in turn was let up through the starboard hawser-pipe.

"Heave her!" roared the Skipper. But his voice was swept away in the storm. Only the signal of his raised arm indicated that all was ready for casting the sea anchor overboard.

"Down helm!" he commanded, and the laboring vessel swung slowly into the teeth of the gale.

Ten minutes later the *Erik* rode safely nose to wind. The mass of water-logged canvas and spars to which she was fast acted as a floating anchor—

BOUND NORTH

whence its name—and kept her from falling off into the trough of the sea and being capsized.

As Rudd left the bridge for some dry clothes he was filled to bursting with admiration for the skill and hardihood of all seamen, Captain Pike in particular. But just as he entered the after hatch his glow of pleasure was cooled by sight of Mr. Menon's friend and accomplice—the helmsman of the previous watch. And he would have been still further discouraged had he heard the man say to another sailor :

“I tell you I don't like it. If she's what the Boss says there sure ain't no safety in this kind of weather !”

CHAPTER III

ICE!

THE seaman's misgivings as well as Rudd's luckily proved ill-founded. The stout little *Erik* rode out the gale as if she had been a fat-sided duck. Three days the wind roared through the shrouds and the seas flung by in white-crested ranks. But the decks were scarcely wet.

On the fourth morning the wind hauled aft. The sea anchor was cut adrift and canvas spread on both masts. With a full head of steam on the engines, the *Erik* boiled northward at a good fifteen knots.

"I thought we'd see some ice along here," Rudd remarked to Dr. Barlow.

"Patience, old scout," smiled the leader. "You'll see a-plenty when the time comes. As a matter of fact that blow took us a little outside the southerly stream that flows down from Baffin Bay. In it are the thousands of great icebergs which are born yearly from the Greenland glaciers. One of them sank the *Titanic* a few years ago. No, there's no ice near yet."

Rudd wasn't sure how the Doctor could be so positive until a few days later when he awakened

ICE!

from a sound sleep with the feeling that something must be wrong with the ship. For a minute he lay still wondering what could bring such a queer sensation of danger. All was quiet. There was no sound of any sort of commotion overhead. Unable to stand his anxiety Rudd threw on his trousers and leather coat. On deck he suddenly realized what was wrong. After ten days of tossing the vessel was absolutely level in the water. And though the throbbing engines told him she was under way, there was no movement of the steady deck to indicate she was even afloat. It was as if he had in some miraculous way been transferred to the tranquil hold of a Mississippi River steamboat.

On topside there was still no explanation of the mystery. Due to the northern latitude, daylight now lasted all night; even midnight being bright enough to read a newspaper. The fog common to northern regions still clung to the sea's surface which was flat and glassy.

"Can we have entered some inland water?" thought Rudd, and made his way hastily to the bridge. Scarcely had he reached the head of the ladder when a long cry came from the barrel in the foremast. It was the lookout.

"Hard a-sta-a-a-r-board, sir!"

The words brought a quiver to Rudd's back.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Something was happening. He still didn't know exactly what.

The wheel spun round and the *Erik's* nose fell off so rapidly she seemed to spin on her heel.

A sudden chattering sound broke from the smoky mist ahead. It was as if a thousand seabirds were twittering to one another.

"Full speed astern!" barked Norman, who had the deck.

A quartermaster swung the engine-room telegraph back with a vicious jerk that threatened to pull the mechanism out by its roots.

Then Rudd got the thrill of his life. For a second he thought an ocean liner was bearing down upon them. But instantly he realized no vessel was to be met in these deserted waters. Already the *Erik* was a thousand miles north of the trade lanes. A gray mountain loomed dead ahead. Its size was so colossal that the ship seemed to have slid into the gloom of a land-locked harbor.

Such is the gigantic stature of an iceberg.

"Give her all you've got!" bawled Norman down the voice tube.

He was not a moment too soon. Scarcely had his maneuver carried the *Erik* clear and given her a comfortable sternboard when a rumble like that of April thunder arose from the berg. A series of fearful crashes followed. It was as if some sea

ICE!

monster had broken loose and in his rage was throwing boulders big as houses about in the sea. Swirling water frothed past the ship and strange choppy waves rocked her jerkily.

Rudd stood petrified at the phenomenon. A voice at his elbow startled him out of his trance.

"Pleasant navigation, what?" It was Dr. Barlow grinning broadly. "Nice little surprise for breakfast, I call it, to have a million-ton iceberg crop up right in the course we're trying to steer!"

"Well—I—guess—yes!" stammered Rudd.

"Notice the difference in the sea?" asked the Doctor.

"No roll, you mean? What's the trouble?"

"I'd hardly call it trouble. Pretty nice after that storm, I think. Means ice. Soon as a flat calm comes we know there's ice ahead. Ice kills even the ground swell. Trash ice, small broken pieces that is, are about all we find along here. Trash ice and bergs. That fellow we nearly rammed must be on the edge of the field."

"Guess we'd have stove the whole bow in if we'd hit it," ventured Rudd.

"No, the danger is not so much that of collision. Our bow is ten feet of solid oak. And the timbers running aft are double-braced for fifty feet. Peril lies chiefly in the calving. 'Calving' is the arctic term for breaking off of huge masses of ice from a glacier

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

or iceberg. Both become rotten in the summer warmth and the slightest shake will snap off lumps as big as apartment houses. All that noise you heard was the calving caused by the slight ripple we made on our approach. And the subsequent row was the capsizing of the berg itself."

"You mean it turned over?"

"Yes. Ice is so nearly the same density as water that seven-eighths of it floats beneath the surface. That mountain we saw through the mist was only a fraction of the whole. And when large hunks came off, its balance was disturbed sufficiently to cause the entire iceberg to topple over and float in a new position."

While Dr. Barlow was speaking a rift of sunlight cut through the fog. Several puffs of air rippled the water, then freshened to a breeze; and in the space of seconds, as if by an invisible hand, the heavy vapor blanket was drawn from the sea's surface.

"Oh-h!" gasped Rudd.

Spread before his eyes lay an endless expanse of sparkling blue water dotted by a myriad of pure white ice floes. Near at hand, in isolated grandeur, floated the great berg that had so nearly annihilated the *Erik*. Here and there through the field floated other bergs. And from it all came the unending chattering noises that had so mystified Rudd, noises

ICE!

caused by little waves splashing under the shelves they cut in the fragile edges of each ice cake.

"Summer slush," explained Dr. Barlow. "The solid fields that jam the upper end of Baffin Bay break out with the tide each summer and drift southward until they gradually go to pieces in the warm edge of the Gulf Stream off Newfoundland."

Already the ship had begun to crunch through the cakes, her way perceptibly slowed.

"Won't it cut a hole in our side?" asked Rudd anxiously.

"Not by a jugful! Double sheathing we've got, with a metal plating over that to stand for just such scraping as this."

While Rudd continued to marvel at the brilliant scene he noticed emerge from the cabin hatch a staggering figure he recognized as Caverly. Poor fellow! He at least could begin to enjoy some of the voyage now that his seasickness had disappeared. In friendly spirit Rudd stepped down to greet him.

"Great stuff!" he exclaimed, nodding towards the berg astern.

Caverly stared coldly at his shipmate without so much as glancing at the berg.

"Nearly rammed it, you know," continued Rudd, a little embarrassed by the other's rudeness.

"Really?" said the green-faced Caverly.
"Humph!"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

And that was all. He rammed his hands into his pockets and stalked past with all the dignity his weakness would permit.

Then the humor of such behavior struck Rudd full force. He struggled to control the chuckles that bubbled up. "Holy bowlines!" he giggled, "if His Majesty doesn't think I'm the galley boy!"

Rudd watched Caverly curiously. He shambled forward near the foremast where Mr. Menon stood near the rail directing the stowage of some ground tackle. When the men had finished their task and laid below, Caverly sidled up to the First Officer and took his arm. Some word passed between them which Rudd was unable to catch. But the friendly gesture coupled with what he already had seen of the disagreeable Mr. Menon brought a determination to find Dr. Barlow at once and make a clean breast of the conversation he had overheard the day the storm began.

Dr. Barlow listened with all seriousness. And yet, when Rudd had finished describing Mr. Menon's threatening words to the helmsman, he firmly refused to accept Rudd's view of the matter.

"The past days have been a revelation to me," observed the Doctor. "Mr. Menon has without doubt an ugly look about him. And he has within your hearing apparently hinted at some sort of treachery. Yet I have never seen better seamanship

ICE!

than he displayed during the gale. Moreover, Captain Pike tells me he is thoroughly satisfied with him as an officer. The men obey his orders implicitly."

"But doesn't that bear out exactly what I have said?" was Rudd's doubting reply. "He has won enough friends in the forecastle by threat or bribery to make him stronger than the Captain himself."

Dr. Barlow patted Rudd's back reassuringly. "Now look here, old man, don't wish any bookish romance on us. These are picked men aboard. They are well paid and well fed. They have every reason to know they will be home in the autumn. Even if they aren't, they will get good money for a winter north. The ship is specially built for rough work. No harm can befall her without the most exceptional misfortune in choosing our way west. Let's enjoy ourselves while we may, and not look too much for trouble just because there is a seasick weakling and a piratical-looking mate among us."

But Rudd was not convinced. He shook his head and glanced forward to where Caverly and Mr. Menon still had their heads together.

"Perhaps you're right, Doctor," he faltered. "But—well, I don't know."

He was destined to know sooner than he realized.

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

THAT evening all hands gathered on deck to see the midnight sun. For nearly two weeks the ship had been navigated by dead reckoning alone. But this day Captain Pike had got a good sight of the sun for latitude near noon. His computation put the *Erik* on the outer boundary of Melville Bay, that great scoop on the upper western edge of Greenland. Here as early as May the sun ceases to set. On June 21 it reaches its greatest declination. And not until late August does it begin to dip below the horizon at night. Even then, as in the spring, daylight lasts through the twenty-four hours.

In October comes the darkness. With the waning summer, cold increases, so that by the time the sun disappears every bay and fiord is locked with heavy ice that grows through the terrible winter until it is more than a fathom thick.

As the sun dipped lower and lower in the west, the wild spread of sea and floes took on a beautiful rosy hue. Even the weather-beaten little *Erik* was transfigured by the light.

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

"Looks like a picture post card," said Rudd, in an effort to describe the unreality of the brilliant tints and hues about him.

"Does indeed!" agreed Dr. Barlow. "And you will see many other magnificent sights before you reach home again. When the fog disappears this arctic atmosphere is so extraordinarily free from dust or moisture that color effects are far more sharp than in the south where smoke and dirt particles create a continual haze over everything. Even the famed mountain air of the Rockies cannot be compared with the knifelike keenness of the far north.

Lower and lower rolled the great red ball of the sun. At eleven-thirty its under edge touched the horizon just west of north. Strata of air at different densities caused refraction and distorted the flaming ball to a series of grotesque rectangular shapes. One minute it would be long and narrow. The next, glowing humps and angles would deform it to a lop-sided conflagration as if some vast city were burning at the edge of the world.

"Twelve o'clock, sir," announced the quartermaster.

"Strike eight bells," from Captain Pike.

And Rudd saw for the first time the strange spectacle of the sun shining at exactly the middle of the night.

His emotion was not lessened when Caverly

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

stepped up and began to converse as if he and Rudd had been growing friends instead of almost utter strangers since the cruise began.

"Saw the same thing off North Cape, Norway, some years ago," the Boston lad observed.

"You did?" returned Rudd politely. He had heard from Professor Deal that Caverly's father had made a point of sending his son all over the world for the sake of education.

"Yes," went on the globe-trotter, "and I nearly saw the midnight sun at the other end of the earth off New Zealand."

The speaker couldn't resist a slight air of superiority as he described his exploits. Yet Rudd was so relieved at this marked change from Caverly's former enmity that he was quite willing to play second fiddle to the boaster. Furthermore, Rudd's physical superiority was so marked that he was prepared to be quite satisfied even if Caverly should claim a visit to the moon.

"Must be great to be able to travel any old place any old time," said Rudd with real eagerness.

Caverly gave him a sharp look. "Say," he said, "how would you like to take a trip abroad with me next year?"

This was a little more than Rudd had bargained for. He had had experience enough with men to appreciate the strength of true character. No real

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

man was going to snub a fellow one minute and offer him unlimited hospitality the next unless there was something behind it.

"We could leave Boston in June and be back in time for Christmas," went on the other.

"I tell you, Caverly," began Rudd cautiously.

"Call me Reggie, will you?" broke in his companion.

"Well—*Reggie*—" echoed Rudd with some difficulty; the name somehow didn't feel right in his mouth—"it's pretty fine of you to want to do anything like that for me."

But while Reggie went on describing the attractions of such a journey Rudd kept wondering what could be behind his sudden friendship. Was it possible that the lad was in cahoots with Mr. Menon, and the officer had persuaded him to win Rudd to their evil scheme, whatever it was?

At this moment Mr. Menon himself strode swiftly aft and leaned over the cabin skylight. This was rather a strange act in view of the fact that all hands and the cook were still clustered near the rail discussing the spectacular beauty of the midnight sun.

Rudd watched him covertly, noting with interest an inexplicable intensity of feeling that seemed to stiffen the man's hawklike features. A moment later Mr. Menon clenched his fists and swore under

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

his breath. Then he dashed to the hatch and disappeared below.

Almost immediately came the dull thud of a blow and the outcry of a man hurt, followed by crashing sounds of a struggle. Before Rudd could shout or move Dr. Barlow dashed past him and down the companionway from which issued the tumult of a fight. Silence followed, punctuated by spurts of angry talk as if some one were explaining the trouble. Then Mr. Menon reappeared, dragging behind him a fireman named Boggs, followed by Dr. Barlow looking thoroughly angry.

"Take him right up to the Captain," snapped the Doctor.

"Bet your boots!" snarled Mr. Menon through his teeth. "And I hope he puts the thief in irons."

The Skipper, overhearing the riot from the bridge, came to meet them. Seamen and engineers gathered near the mainmast in a curious sullen crowd. Rudd, remembering vividly his early suspicions of the First Officer, looked from him to his captive in an effort to understand what connection this new trouble might have with what had gone before.

"You tell him, Doctor," urged Mr. Menon.

"Captain Pike," began Dr. Barlow, "this is a case for your judgment and discipline. Through the alertness of your First Officer we have caught

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

a thief among us. Fireman Boggs took advantage of the absence of all of us from below to rifle my room. Mr. Menon discovered him rummaging through my locker."

Captain Pike turned his keen gaze upon the culprit. His attitude was one of firmness and severity. And yet there was a measure of fairness in his kind old white-whiskered face that encouraged confidence. "Have you anything to say, Boggs?" he asked.

Boggs squirmed in the grip that held him and gave Mr. Menon an anxious side glance.

"Let him go," commanded the Skipper.

With a threatening scowl the Officer released his hold.

"Now Boggs—?"

"It's not true, sir," began the alleged thief. "I wasn't down there to steal. I had cause to find out——"

A sort of snarl escaped from the compressed lips of Mr. Menon. "Now don't lie about it, you beach-scat!"

"Silence, Mr. Menon," ordered the Captain. "Now go on, Boggs. You say you had cause?"

At this moment some one in the crowd of men near the mast cleared his throat loudly. Rudd, keyed to alertness by the whole fracas, looked up quickly with the accused man in time to catch the same sort

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

of villainous and threatening look from one of the deck hands that Mr. Menon had given a moment before. It was too much for poor Boggs. His shoulders hunched, his hands began to tremble, and he nearly collapsed on the deck.

"It's true, sir," he said, with tears in his voice. "I just thought I'd see what I could get."

"Quite so," broke in Dr. Barlow testily. "Captain, I have been to sea before and there is nothing so loathsome as a man who would rob his own shipmates. I hope you see fit to punish this man appropriately." Mr. Menon shuffled his feet. "And," continued the Doctor, "with equal fairness commend the attention to duty shown by Mr. Menon."

Captain Pike said nothing for a moment. He stared searchingly first into the injured and determined countenance of Dr. Barlow; then at the triumphant leer on Mr. Menon's visage. Last of all he studied the tear-streaked smudges on Boggs' cheeks.

"The trouble is," he said at last, "that while I have been acquainted with you, Dr. Barlow, and you, Mr. Menon, for a goodly number of years, I have known Lem Boggs since the day he was born; I knew his father and his grandfather before him. And I have never heard of any of them doing anything dishonest." He stroked his white whiskers slowly. "I appreciate your position, gentlemen, and

THE MIDNIGHT SUN

I have every determination that wrongdoing shall be fully punished on my ship. But I should like to think this matter over. Please give me until to-morrow. Until then, Boggs shall be free. I hold myself personally responsible for him. Do you hear that, Boggs?"

Rudd couldn't help a smile at the wretch's look of relief. But he was thoroughly disappointed at the expression of disapproval that came over Dr. Barlow's face. Was it possible that he was playing right into the hands of this villain, Menon? Was it possible that the whole thing was framed up either to discredit Captain Pike, even Boggs, and win Dr. Barlow unwittingly to the side of the First Officer?

"And there's that shrimp, Caverly, trying to entice me with his offers!" thought Rudd. "I can see myself traveling with a lollypop like that!"

A shout from the mast brought him out of his painful reflections.

"Land ho!"

Greenland at last!

CHAPTER V

ESKIMOS

CAPTAIN PIKE almost immediately recognized the land ahead as Cape York. That meant the first lap of the cruise was done.

"Here it is," Dr. Barlow pointed out to Rudd on a chart spread over the cabin table. "You see we are in seventy-five degrees north latitude, over two thousand miles due north of New York. Greenland is a great island continent. Few people have any conception of the enormous expanse that lies within its rock borders."

Rudd traced the outline with his fingers. Maps that he had seen in his geographies did not show so clearly as this arctic chart the vast area bounding one side of the Polar Sea. It was a pear-shaped body of land, 1,500 miles from tip to tip, and about 1,000 miles wide at its broadest part. Melville Bay was simply a gigantic bite out of the western edge, with Cape York at its extremity.

"All expeditions on this side of America make Cape York first," explained the Doctor, "in order to avoid the ice pack brought down by the Baffin Land

ESKIMOS

currents to the west. Also we can get some idea of ice conditions we shall meet by climbing the low peak you see just behind the Cape. There is a landing possible for boats at that point."

"I don't see much land," commented Rudd in a disappointed tone.

The Doctor chuckled. "Man alive, don't you know that ninety per cent of Greenland is buried under an ice cap thousands of feet thick? Its interior is one great glacier. Only this narrow fringe along the coast and a trifling area near Cape Farewell at the southern tip are free from ice and snow. That gray-blue shadow you see running back from the Cape is an ice blanket that runs up to an altitude of nearly ten thousand feet at its highest point. Accumulation of snow on its back creates pressure enough to send forth the rivers of ice we call glaciers creeping out from the fiords and over the land itself. As the glaciers recede, great gorges and hollows are left in the rocky heights, scoured out by the terrible weight of untold billions of tons of ice flooding over them through the centuries."

Even this brief description brought a feeling of solemnity to Rudd as he contemplated the gigantic forces of nature as compared with puny human beings.

As the *Erik* neared the Cape the low brown blur which it first had seemed rose gradually above the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

horizon until it became a reddish highland nearly crowded into the sea by the massed wall of white ice directly behind it.

"Pretty bare looking country all right," said Rudd.

"Rather," agreed the Doctor. "We're nearly a thousand miles north of the tree line now. In South Greenland where the small Danish colonies of Eskimos fish and hunt, a type of stunted willow manages to endure the severe winters. Up here only the hardiest plants can exist through the brief and snowy summer."

"You mean it snows in summer, too?"

"I should think so, maybe you'll see a drizzle of rain once or twice. Snowstorms in July and August are by no means unusual. This is not Alaska. The settled part of that territory is hundreds of miles south of us. Trees grow, rain rains, and all manner of civilized weather occurs. Up here in the real arctic you will find a ferocity of climate not to be compared with any winter you have ever known."

"Then how do the Eskimos exist?"

Before the Doctor could reply Norman came running up to say that he had sighted some of the native boats threading their way through the ice. Rudd jumped into the rigging for a look.

At first he could see nothing but the unbroken spread of ice pans and water lanes. Then something

ESKIMOS

like a black bug became visible, darting in and out among the ice. Several other black bugs followed close behind. A little later the bugs turned into tiny craft no wider than a canoe, and with but a few inches freeboard. In fact, each small wave washed right over their decks.

They were the famous Eskimo kayaks, probably the most remarkable type of boat in the world. A kayak's frame may be either small bones or bits of driftwood lashed at its joints. Over it is stretched a cover of sealskins sewed together. The skins shrink and form a taut water-tight hull and deck. The hunter sits in a small hole at the boat's center. As the total depth is less than a foot his weight hangs suspended, as it were, below the center of flotation. Thus, instead of being balanced, he can be said to be hung like a pendulum in his kayak. Heavy seas will not capsize him. Swift walrus can scarcely escape him. And even the sharpest ice pinnacle cannot cut the tough hide which alone protects him from the icy water outside.

Four of the hunters clambered over the side at the request of Captain Pike, who had met them several times on his trips north with Peary. After a brief greeting he led them to the galley and ordered the cook to serve coffee.

These Eskimos were the strangest looking people Rudd had ever set eyes upon. While their faces

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

were round and fat and greasy their bodies were almost slender; and they were so short that any one of them could have walked under his outstretched arm without striking it. They were dressed entirely in skins. Boots of scraped seal covered their legs to their knees; breeches of white bearskin and shirts of the hair seal clad the rest of their bodies. Their long black hair fell over their shoulders.

Rudd approached one for a better look at him.

"*Shunaqsuak?*" inquired the Eskimo with a broad grin.

But just then Rudd got a whiff of the fellow and nearly fainted. Such a rank odor met his civilized nostrils that he gagged. Something in his expression must have communicated his feelings to the natives. They all began to laugh and jabber at the same time.

Captain Pike stuck his head over the bridge-rail and listened. "They're on to you, Rudd," he laughed. "They say 'the White-man's nose is bigger than an Eskimo's but not nearly as strong. It can't even stand the smell of an igloo.' "

"Should think not," retorted Rudd emphatically, "if it's anything like the packing house perfume these birds carry!"

He soon got over his squeamishness, though. After dinner he joined a party in the whaleboat and landed near the Eskimo encampment just clear of the beach ice. There were five skin tents or *tupiks*

ESKIMOS

in which the Eskimos lived in summer, as snow igloos are too hot and damp. At least two hundred dogs and twenty children of all ages swarmed about the white men. Several women appeared shyly at the tent doors carrying babies in a kind of pouch in the skin shirts they wore.

"Is this all there are?" Rudd asked of the Doctor.

"By no means. There are at least thirty-five families in this tribe, nearly three hundred men, women, and children. They are distributed in small wandering groups up and down the coast for several hundred miles. Fortunately they are entirely cut off from civilization except for the occasional expeditions that touch here or winter at one of their more northern camping sites."

He went on to relate how each family is absolutely independent; how there is no money, no mail, no business, no war, nor any of the other nuisances civilized man is accustomed to endure. Lifework among them consists wholly in securing meat to feed one's family and enough skins to clothe them. All other time is put in at playing games, visiting, and planning the next hunting party. Walrus and seal meat are the principal articles of diet. Polar bears, caribou, and musk oxen are considered greater delicacies, probably because somewhat more difficult to secure.

"You must appreciate the fact," said the Doctor

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

emphatically, "that here you have almost the only race of people that has not been spoiled by the white man. In Alaska the Eskimo has become a dirty parasite. In the south seas the islander has become diseased and lazy. Everywhere civilized man has gone, he has visited his bad habits and his troubles upon the happy and independent tribes of human beings which have been so fortunate as to escape the yoke of society."

Rudd revolved this interesting information in his mind during his tough march up the hill. And, when he finally joined the others on the summit, he realized all the more fully what a remarkable individual the Eskimo is.

South, lay the berg-dotted reaches of Melville Bay. To the north, continued in a series of precipitous red cliffs, the same rocky fringe of land as the pinnacle on which he stood. To the west, spread blue sea, only sparsely marked with ice, and defined at the horizon by a low purplish haze which Captain Pike said was the shores of Ellsemere Land.

Behind Rudd lay the ice cap. He gazed longest at this, realizing that it would be the hardest thing to describe when he got home again. Its gray-white desolation had none of the countable marks as did the sea with its icebergs. Its unbroken expanse of terrible blankness was utterly devoid of the shades and tints, the lights and shadows, that made

ESKIMOS

the deep red cliffs so remarkable. It was simply a dead thing of immeasurable size. It was terrifying—gruesome!

“Rock and ice—how can the Eskimos ever live here?” Rudd asked himself. “And when the months and months of darkness shut out even this dreadful bareness what do they do?” He turned to Captain Pike, who had wintered among them. “*What do they do?*” he asked in an almost beseeching voice.

The Skipper laughed his booming choke and shrugged his thick shoulders. “Do!” he roared. “Why they do everything that’s worth doing.” And he boomed again. “They go hunting, and sing, and run races, and eat—bust me if they don’t each eat more than any two double-fisted sailormen; that is, when there’s enough to eat. Sometimes they go on starvation rations that would knock out a dog—boil up old skin clothes and get away with them as if they were the best Irish stew! They’re men, these little fellows are, mark my naked word, son!”

But it took less than the Skipper’s speech to convince Rudd. On his way home he peeped in at one of the tupiks. It was empty except for a bed of skins, a tiny blubber lamp, and some odds and ends of rotten seal meat. This, he discovered, gave off the strong odor characteristic of all Eskimos. Even as he stood there inhaling it, he found it becoming

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

less distasteful. Indeed, there came a time before Rudd escaped from the arctic's fearsome clutches when a whiff of the same fragrance would have set his lean jaws dripping with desire for a taste of the rank meat.

He turned to make his way back to the landing. By the next tupik stood a woman. She did not see Rudd, but was apparently waiting for some one to come by. Rudd followed her glance and spied the unfortunate Boggs picking his way through the rocky débris from the cliff above. The woman stepped out and met him; she took him gently by his sleeve and led him to her tent.

"Aha," thought Rudd, "so Boggsy's got a sweetheart!"

Hoping to hear something he could tease the fireman about after he returned aboard, Rudd waited until both had disappeared into the tupik, then stepped near enough to hear their conversation through the thin skin walls.

To his amazement he heard a familiar voice say: "Well, fumble-thumbs, I thought I'd try you again."

It was the First Officer.

"Honest, Mr. Menon," whined Boggs, "I didn't mean to start anything."

"Then what did you mean by saying you 'had cause' when they pinched you in that fool Doctor's room?"

ESKIMOS

"Fool Doctor!" echoed Rudd to himself. "So that's what he thinks in private about the man who backed him up!"

"It was your claim, sir," went on the frightened Boggs, "that we'd never get through the Northwest Passage as they're aiming to do."

"They won't," growled Mr. Menon, "not in the *Erik*, anyway."

"That's what you said, sir. And you wouldn't tell me any more, except to offer me the money for——"

"Cut that," snapped the Officer. "I don't want you to get in the habit of mentioning my offer, even in private. Now let's have the real reason why you went into the Doctor's room. Be quick about it. I don't want to be seen here with you."

"To get a chart, sir. Honest, that was all. I jest wanted to see if what you said was so, that there wasn't no way of getting by boat through to Alaska 'cross the top of North America."

Rudd heard a quick movement and a thud as if the blubber lamp had been knocked over. "Thought I was a liar, did you!" he heard the Officer exclaim. And then Boggs burst from the tent at full speed and dashed headlong for the whaleboat on the beach.

CHAPTER VI

THE POLE STAR

ON the deck of the *Erik* amidships just forward of the bridge stanchions was secured a large motor boat. She had been purchased by the government as a sort of auxiliary to the *Erik*. Shallow waters and narrow passages were sure to be encountered north which would necessitate a certain amount of pioneer work ahead of the main exploring party.

The *Pole Star*, as the boat was named, was a forty-foot cabin launch built along the same lines as the *Erik*. In fact her heavy blunt and curving bow, her stocky beam, and her stout-timbered hull formed almost an exact miniature of the full-grown whaler. She was equipped with a powerful twelve-cylinder engine that would burn gasoline or kerosene. A stumpy mast forward permitted sail to be used in case the engine broke down, as well as providing a means of steadying the little craft in case the sea became too heavy for comfort.

When Rudd reached the ship he found preparations under way for launching the *Pole Star* as

THE POLE STAR

soon as western waters were reached. The plan was to cross Baffin Bay to Lancaster Sound which, as the map shows, is the entrance to a confused mass of islands known as the Arctic Archipelago.

Rudd's feelings over what he had heard ashore in the Eskimo tent reached a climax when he saw how cordially Dr. Barlow greeted both Mr. Menon and Reggie on their return. Dr. Barlow was too fine a man to be a party to any such deviltry as Rudd suspected. And yet he was so plainly deceived by both rascals that Rudd felt perfectly hopeless about trying to approach him again. Boggs, of course, was out of the question as a source of information. He was too much cowed by the First Officer. Professor Deal was too absorbed in his scientific work, which had already begun with their arrival at Cape York. Norman was inclined to favor Mr. Menon as his superior officer.

Only Captain Pike remained. Rudd felt that at least the Skipper would hear him through. Immediately after supper he went to the cabin, where the latter was poring over some charts.

"May I see you alone for a few minutes, Captain?"

The Skipper eyed Rudd over his glasses. "Holy Bowlines!" he ejaculated with a twinkle, "are you having hallucinations, too?" Then his face became stern. "Out with it, lad," he said gravely.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd hesitated. "I don't want to make trouble, sir," he said apologetically, "but I have seen and heard things that I believe you should know."

"The Captain should know everything," affirmed the Skipper, "if he wants to have a happy ship."

"It's the success of the expedition, sir, that I'm after," continued Rudd stoutly. "And I don't believe we shall get very far if one of your officers is bribing men to join him in some sort of plot."

"What sort of plot?" asked the Skipper quietly.

"That's what I don't know, sir. I overheard Boggs tell Mr. Menon he was just trying to see the charts in Dr. Barlow's room to find out whether we could get through the Northwest Passage or not. I am convinced Mr. Menon plans to lead a mutiny aboard the *Erik* and prevent our carrying out the cruise."

Captain Pike slowly stroked his whiskers as he was accustomed to do when pondering a knotty problem. "Rudd, can I trust you?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I will tell you that your guess is wrong. I have some men in my crew who have been sailing with me for years. They would go through hell for me. They have been offered one thousand dollars apiece, not to mutiny, but to obey implicitly any orders they shall receive."

"Receive from you, sir?" puzzled Rudd.

THE POLE STAR

"Yes, orders from me. The mysterious thing about it is that I didn't make the offer. Mr. Menon made it. The scoundrel!" Captain Pike here brought his huge fist down on the table so hard the charts lifted several inches in the air. "Does he think he can persuade *me* to join him in any deviltry?"

"But what could his plan be, sir?"

"That I can't fathom. Mutiny would have no purpose that I can imagine. The ship is not equipped for a successful gold search, or for trading purposes, though Mr. Menon might have an ingenious scheme that would put money into his pocket by exploiting the Eskimos. But even that would not account for his being able to offer some twenty thousand dollars cash to my men."

"How about piracy?"

"Doesn't pay these days. American destroyers would nab him before he had steamed a week. Any way you take it he hasn't a chance to profit by seizing the *Erik*. I'm simply going to let him play into my hands and then lock him up for a prison sentence when we get back; this, despite he's been a lawyer in his younger days and knows the ins and outs of courts pretty well."

"You're not going to do anything about it then, sir?" asked Rudd in such a worried way that Cap-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

tain Pike broke into his old booming laugh and said:

"Indeed I am, my boy. Many a Captain might have saved himself a pot of trouble by seeing the storm before it broke. I'm going to speed up Dr. Barlow in his preliminary investigation of Lancaster Sound. Then I'm going to call the men aft and explain conditions in terms they will understand. I shall go myself on the *Pole Star* for a look at the ice. The hands forward trust me. If I tell them we can get through they'll go no matter if that penny villain, Menon, offers them a million. They know he's been in trouble before and will probably get himself into jail again if he keeps on."

Rudd felt vastly comforted by the Skipper's words. It seemed as if nothing could go wrong, with a man aboard like the old sea dog. All his life Captain Pike had been battling storms; he had fought mutinies; he had been shipwrecked; five times he had been given up for lost! No wonder he could keep a lap ahead of a "penny villain," as he termed his First Officer.

Not even the sight of Caverly perched on the *Pole Star's* deck could disturb Rudd's new-found peace of mind.

"Hello, Reggie!" he called.

But Caverly scarcely noticed the hail. He was absorbed in something going on inside the motor

THE POLE STAR

boat. He was gazing intently into her tiny engine room as if taking a lesson in motor operation.

A few minutes later Mr. Menon appeared from within the boat and wiped his hands on a piece of waste. Spying Rudd he grinned somewhat sheepishly and remarked: "Nice boat, isn't she? I was just showing young Caverly here what a neat engine installation she had."

Somehow his words did not ring true.

Baffin Bay proved remarkably free from ice on the trip across. Thirty-six hours run over a glassy sea brought the *Erik* to the entrance of Lancaster Sound. Here again ice conditions proved so excellent that after a conference between Dr. Barlow and Captain Pike it was decided to continue in as far as open water would permit.

Not until the northern point of Boothia Felix Peninsula was reached did any serious ice menace the *Erik's* progress. Amundsen had wintered here many years before and there was available a small and sheltered harbor in which the *Erik* might lie and replenish her supply of fresh water.

The land here proved quite different from the Greenland coast. Though there were patches of ice cap on the elevations, the valleys and low shores were nearly devoid of snow. In sheltered spots with southern exposure, the green vegetation gave a most inviting appearance.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Immediately after anchoring Captain Pike had steam put on the cargo engines, the booms rigged out, and the *Pole Star* hooked on for launching. Her great weight made the task a difficult and somewhat dangerous one; but she was finally in the water looking trim and smart and ready for any duty.

Dr. Barlow had charge of fitting out the brief expedition. As he and Captain Pike both favored a look at Victoria Strait to the southwest as well as McClintock Channel to the northwest, provisions for a week at least were necessary.

The principal items of diet were to be pemmican and hard biscuit. Pemmican is a tinned mixture of beef and suet, with enough sugar and raisins to give it an agreeable flavor. Tea was to be the only beverage. Dr. Barlow explained to Rudd that it was highly preferable to coffee for hard work. Coffee is a brain stimulant and when taken in large quantities is damaging to a man's digestion. Tea, on the other hand, is a heart stimulant. It will warm a man up in bitter weather with nearly the speed and efficiency of spirits. And it can be imbibed in almost unlimited amounts without greatly interfering with the explorer's physical condition. Thus it is favored by all travelers in rigorous climates, as well as those engaged in mountaineering.

Captain Pike, Dr. Barlow, and Rudd were selected

THE POLE STAR

as the party to go. Boggs begged to be put in charge of the engine. Secretly he was a little afraid to be left on the ship with Mr. Menon. The latter was to have gone too. Indeed, Captain Pike would have insisted upon it despite the severe cold the First Officer claimed to have. However, he could not very well order the would-be invalid on the trip after Dr. Barlow testified that any sort of exposure should be avoided by Mr. Menon until he felt better. The Skipper finally swallowed the situation by insisting that if Menon was too ill to go, he should be put on the sick list and Norman in command. This solution was put into effect.

Caverly joined at the last minute. Rudd would have preferred his staying aboard. But he was so unpleasantly insistent in reminding Dr. Barlow how much money his father had put up that he was finally permitted to go. It was some consolation to Rudd to feel that Reggie and Mr. Menon would be separated for a few days. During the past week they had put in most of their time at long and suspiciously quiet talks.

Five high-powered Winchester rifles and a thousand rounds of ammunition were put aboard last of all.

"Fresh meat is our best bet against scurvy," observed Dr. Barlow, "and if we don't load up with

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

musk ox and walrus meat before our return I'm very much mistaken."

Boggs soon had the engine turning over, and opening his throttle full he let her go. The crew gave a cheer as the sturdy little *Pole Star* swung clear of the *Erik* and Norman, now in command, waved his cap from the bridge. The First Officer was nowhere in sight. If he cared about the separation he didn't show it.

"Certainly is an open season," commented the Skipper as the boat sped south through the nearly ice-free waters west of Boothia Felix. "I believe we might have gone right ahead with the *Erik* after all."

But the Skipper was wrong, however, as events proved soon enough. Rudd had gone on watch near midnight while the others slept. Though the *Pole Star* had been anchored near the beach there was always danger that a large pan might drift by and carry her ashore. He had just walked forward to see that the anchor was holding well when a gust of wind struck him that nearly knocked him overboard. Nothing could have been more bewildering. A moment before the sea was calm. Now it was streaked with "willi-waws." While hesitating whether to veer more chain or call the Skipper he saw the white froth of a squall not a thousand yards away and approaching rapidly. Before it were being

THE POLE STAR

driven half a hundred deadly looking floes bearing down on the helpless *Pole Star*.

"Turn out everybody!" yelled Rudd and fairly flung himself at the capstan.

Ten minutes later all hands had got the anchor up and Boggs managed to start his engine humming just before the floes crashed into the boat. The *Pole Star* turned and scudded before the wind, which was a typical summer arctic gale. Due north lay a mountainous grounded iceberg a mile away. If she could reach the lee of that before swamping she had a chance for life.

CHAPTER VII

ABANDONED!

THOUGH the sun shone brightly the fury of the wind increased every moment. Rudd took the helm and handled her under Captain Pike's direction.

"Mind her now!" bawled the old fellow in his ear when the iceberg bore well on the beam. "Hard a-starboard!" Rudd spun his wheel just in time to round the little boat up into the quiet water behind the berg before a nasty knife-edged floe shot past.

"Moor her!" ordered the Skipper.

Rudd and Dr. Barlow leaped from the bow to a low jutting arm of the floating mass. With a camp ax the latter swiftly cut a ring in the compact ice and thrust in the painter that Boggs hove from the *Pole Star*.

"There," panted Rudd, "I guess that'll hold her!" He prided himself on his knowledge of nautical knotting.

"Hold her, yes," assented Dr. Barlow. "But what will hold this berg?"

"You mean it may go?"

ABANDONED!

The Doctor scrutinized the sky. "If I am not mistaken, we are in for a day or so of this weather. If any sort of swell makes up, the berg is likely to split and crush us. However, we wouldn't last an hour out in that stew!"

Rudd looked at the boiling waves and saw he was right. The gale was blowing almost dead from the northwest. Had the *Pole Star* attempted to weather it she would either have been swept upon the rocky shores of the peninsula or splintered to shreds by the driving ice.

Caverly, as usual, had succumbed to seasickness when the launch had started to toss about. However, his fear for the future kept him from turning in.

Captain Pike, with philosophical indifference, lit his pipe and waited for the weather to abate.

"Bit of a blow, I'm thinking," he told Dr. Barlow, "but I'd hardly call this a storm."

The Doctor steadied himself against an icy rail and took a deep breath. "Captain Pike," he proclaimed in tones loud enough to wake the dead, "I hope some day it'll blow hard enough to tear your blithering whiskers out by their roots!"

"Oho!" boomed the Skipper, "so you don't stomach this summer breeze we're having?"

"Summer breeze!" exclaimed Rudd, as a floe a fathom thick and weighing at least a ton crashed by not ten feet from where he stood. "If this is a

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

summer breeze I hope I never live to see a winter gale!"

A fragrance issued from the cabin hatch. "On my word!" cried the Doctor, "a good old pemmican stew! Hooray for Boggsy the chef!"

The five then squeezed themselves into the little cabin and consumed vast quantities of stew, tea, and biscuit, topped off by a can of apple butter Dr. Barlow drew from his small store of delicacies. Even Reggie recovered sufficiently to join the feast and seemed quite affable until Captain Pike lit his pipe containing a tobacco so violent that every one started coughing and sneezing.

Boggs spent several hours overhauling his engine but was careful not to disable it as the mooring might have to be slipped at any moment.

Rudd later awakened in his sleeping bag, which had been spread in one of the bunks, in time to hear the Skipper insisting that the *Pole Star* must be got clear at once. "This snow will make it impossible for us to avoid the ice."

"But where shall we go?" countered Dr. Barlow.

"Run down the coast for some sort of cove until the weather clears," declared the Skipper with finality.

Rudd found the wind had almost disappeared. A worse outlook was present, however, in the shape of a light snowfall that came down from the north

ABANDONED!

on the remainder of the blow. The sky was overcast and already the land to the east was barely visible through the murk.

"Start her up, Boggs," commanded the Skipper. But just as Rudd was about to throw the painter clear, Boggs appeared at the engine hatch, his face smeared with grease and perspiration, and blowing like a whale.

"Sorry, sir," he panted, "but I been trying for half an hour to get a kick out of her. Ain't no use. She's dead as dead."

Boggs was right. All took turns cranking the engine. Every wire and pipe was gone over. But it simply would not start. There is nothing so dead in the world as a gas engine that won't start.

Every minute the weather was getting thicker. The tide had shifted the iceberg until the *Pole Star* was no longer fully protected from the drifting pans. Her position was becoming more perilous every moment. If she was going to make the land, she would have to start in a hurry. Half an inch of wet snow covered her deck and the dark hills were now almost invisible.

"Break out the canvas," the Skipper ordered, "and be smart about it. We're going to be in a pickle if we don't hurry."

While Rudd tugged at the heavy baled mass of

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

sailcloth, he was overtaken suddenly by a wild suspicion. "Say, Boggs," he asked of the fireman who worked at his elbow, "was Mr. Caverly down in the engine room yesterday?"

"Sure. He slept down there. Said it was the only place he could keep warm. I spread my own bag on deck."

Rudd was startled. Could it be possible that Reggie had something to do with disabling the engine? He had surely received some sort of instruction from Mr. Menon. And yet it was inconceivable that the lad had sufficient physical courage to venture anything so desperate as delaying the *Pole Star's* return. He himself must then become involved in the most hazardous situation imaginable—no less than a winter in the arctic with equipment far too limited to permit all of them to escape alive. The idea was preposterous! And yet Rudd, failing to convince himself, asked Boggs to take another look at the engine as soon as he could. "Might be in the magneto contacts," he suggested.

"Nothin' doin'!" came back Boggs with weariness. "I've tried everything!"

The tiny spritsail gave less than four knots to the *Pole Star*. Yet even with this the beach came out suddenly ahead after about an hour's run. Another hour or so of coasting brought her to an almost invisible break in the rocks. Captain Pike gave one

ABANDONED!

professional squint at the opening and threw the helm down with a yank. Oars were broken out and the *Pole Star* was punted into the snuggest little harbor imaginable. Snow shrouded the hills and lay in a white blanket upon the graveled beach. But scarcely a breath of air stirred in the refuge that now guarded the expedition. Best of all, a growler or small berg lay grounded near the entrance, thus blocking ingress of any threatening floe or pan that still might be savagely seeking the launch.

Scarcely had the anchor splashed overboard than a new catastrophe was heralded by a muffled shout from the engine room. Boggs rushed on deck, waving one hand wildly. Holding the carburetor cover aloft, he cried:

"The float's gone! Dirty work I calls it—but it's gone!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Dr. Barlow. "How's that?"

"The carburetor float's disappeared, sir! It was there yesterday. I cleaned it up myself. Stuck a little and I thought as how I'd jimmy her up a bit!"

Boggs' voluble protests that he wasn't to blame were calmed by a thorough search first of the engine room, then of the entire boat. But Boggs was right. That indispensable part of the carburetor had mys-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

teriously disappeared and was nowhere to be found. Without it the engine was useless.

"Does beat Billy Jiggs!" was Captain Pike's comment.

"Beats nothing—I told you so!" Rudd felt like telling him. "Just one more step in Menon's plot to put this whole party on the everlasting blink!"

But this was no time to trifle with theories about who did what and why. Dr. Barlow was first to size up the situation.

"We've lost two days already," he said angrily. "If we stick here we hazard the whole summer's work. Prevailing winds are from the north, so there isn't a chance of our working back by sail. There's just one way out."

Rudd guessed it with a thrill before the Doctor could add:

"Cut across country to the *Erik*. She is about fifty miles directly east from us. Traveling light two men might reach her. What do you say, Pike?"

The Skipper shook his head. "Rough country this. And I'm thinking arctic travel isn't a trick for any of this party to try right off."

Rudd could contain himself no longer.

"I'll tackle it!" he popped out. "There's no reason I can't cover the distance in one good march. Why——"

Dr. Barlow held up his hand. "Good work, Rudd.

ABANDONED!

I knew you'd volunteer if I asked it; and I believe you've got it in you to do double that if necessary." He turned to Captain Pike. "Here's where youth counts, Pike. I selected this young man for the good and simple reason that, in addition to his likable nature, he has the strength of a young ox. He stood the punishment of football and the endurance strain of crew. Soon as the weather clears I'd like to start him off."

"Not alone—no man travels alone in this country."

Here Boggs stepped forward. "I'll go too, sir."

"Thank you, Boggs," nodded the Skipper. "With your sledging experience along the Labrador you ought to keep up pretty well with the Doctor's young race horse here."

By the time Rudd and Boggs had their packs ready the snow gave evidence of easing up. As a final preparation both turned in for several hours of solid sleep. They awoke to find the visibility good and only an occasional flurry of white flakes to obscure the land east.

"Avoid camping if possible," the Doctor adjured them. "You can never tell in this part of the world what's coming next. When you start to travel keep going."

They got off soon after six P. M. The sun which

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

had come out of the clouds was then low enough to let the air thoroughly cool off and to freeze up the soft snow. As there were no snowshoes available, heavy going would have meant great delay.

The trip proved both longer and easier than was anticipated. By following a glacial valley arduous climbs were avoided. But this plan involved so circuitous a route that after ten hours' march the sea on the other side of the land was not yet in sight.

"Better camp here," suggested the wornout Boggs.

But Rudd remembered Dr. Barlow's caution. "Let's have a rest and a feed," he compromised, "and try to make the ship this lap."

After a "mugup" of tea and cold pemmican they went on. Topping a rise the waters of Boothia Gulf came into view and a conical hill near which the ship had anchored was plainly visible to their left, not over five miles away.

A dip in the land hid the sea for the rest of the journey. As they mounted the last crest overlooking "Erik Harbor," as Dr. Barlow had christened their anchorage, Rudd's tired mind began to conjure up visions of flapjacks, seal steak smothered in onions, and a soft bunk good for about twelve hours' solid sleep. In a burst of anticipation he broke into a run as the last incline sloped away under his feet.

ABANDONED!

“First sight!” he called over his shoulder to Boggs.

Then he stopped dead in his tracks. His joy died within him. He rubbed his eyes, opened his mouth to speak—and was silent.

The ship had disappeared!

CHAPTER VIII

BEARS!

WHEN a man is physically exhausted he has not the same control over his feelings as when normal. In consequence, Rudd's disappointment at not finding the ship where she had been left, and where she was supposed to remain until the *Pole Star* returned, was akin to despair. Tears came into his wind-seared eyes. The hope that had sustained him through the long march was replaced by an oppressive discouragement that magnified his fatigue a hundred times.

"What shall we do?" he asked of Boggs, who had finally dragged himself up and was standing speechless beside him.

"Do?" repeated Boggs vaguely. "Why they ain't nothing to do. I'm done for. Can't walk another step to save me."

"Don't give up, old scout," Rudd cheered him. "You can't tell but what the ship had to leave her anchorage when the storm came and was blown somewhere down the coast. Surely she'll be back as soon as possible."

"Nope," Boggs wagged his head sadly. "I been

BEARS!

expectin' this all along. It's just as Mr. Menon planned: get us off and then beat it with the ship. We'll starve in a week!" The poor man's voice broke. He was ready to surrender to Fate then and there.

"Oh, snap out of it!" said Rudd angrily. "Are you going to lie down and die without a fight? Besides, Captain Pike told me himself that it would be practically impossible for Mr. Menon to get away with seizing the ship. He would have nothing to gain by such a fool move."

While Boggs was not convinced by Rudd's words, Rudd found his own courage bolstered by the necessity of keeping up his companion's spirits. Besides, he could not yet believe that Mr. Menon had had the criminal audacity to steal the ship and abandon the party to their certain death from starvation and cold.

Rudd's natural impulse was to go down and see if any message had been left. Surely Norman would have done what he could to have dropped some hint of why the *Erik* had gone. On the other hand, unless he were a willing party to the plot, he must have been overcome by surprise and imprisoned during the departure.

A groan from Boggs changed Rudd's mind. "What say we go up that next hill and see if she's anywhere in sight?" he suggested.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Can't walk a single step," was Boggs' plaintive reply. "Just leave me, Mr. Winters. I ain't got nothin' to live for anyway."

"All right, old scout," said Rudd cheerily. "I'll leave you, but not to die."

Whereupon he set about making camp as best he could out of the small gear they had brought along. The tiny primus stove, a compressed air design that burned kerosene, he set up and filled with lumps of fresh-water ice for tea. He spread their single piece of canvas on a bare spot of ground and rigged a blanket shirt to make a small windbreak against the light but chilling breeze that came over the icy stretches to the north of them.

"I'm going for a climb now to see if I can spot the ship. Bet ten cents she's just around the corner," he said.

Boggs' only answer was to throw himself down with a deep sigh and close his eyes as if forever. He gave no heed to the fact that if he slept as he was he risked freezing to death. His boots were soaked through from the mushy snow, his clothing damp from perspiration. And the long struggle across the peninsula had so lowered his vitality that he stood little chance of resisting the cold while sleeping. Rudd felt thoroughly desperate. Yet, since he had the moral courage to keep going, his was the responsibility to see that the other man was

BEARS!

not allowed to lose his life unnecessarily. Almost more important than food at this moment was the absolute necessity of spurring Boggs to a manly battle against the fearful complications in which the two found themselves. Moreover, if the ship had gone for good, it was vital that word be got back to the *Pole Star* at the earliest possible moment in order that every ounce of food and fuel be conserved against the terrible days ahead.

The first few steps toward the other hill told Rudd how far his own strength had been depleted. He ached in every joint. His feet were sore and blistered from the long hours in soaked footgear. His back pained. His shoulders chafed from their pack straps. And the tump line he had used part of the time had so stiffened the muscles of his neck that he had to turn his whole body when he wished to look around.

From the summit there was a most excellent view of the coast both north and south. The sea and the land spread in a multicolored panorama at his feet. But the colors were all cold ones—blues and blacks and whites, with only an occasional patch of dirty brown where the land cropped through. Strain his bloodshot eyes as he might Rudd saw no vestige of the ship.

He had brought along a pair of small pocket binoculars. A fall on the first day out had broken

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

one of their prisms. However, it was possible by shutting one eye to get a fair magnification in what field remained. But nothing that even looked like a piece of wreckage was visible in the vast arctic desolation.

"Might as well take a look down by the anchorage then," he muttered. "Maybe they had the decency to leave us a little grub at any rate."

Rudd trained his glass on the beach where he knew some of the crew had gone ashore and set up a small forge on the day of arrival. Except for a dark patch where the fire had been there was no sign that human beings had ever visited the place.

"What the Sam Hill!"

A shiver ran through Rudd's tired body. He had seen something moving on the beach. At first it looked like a piece of dirty ice slowly sliding into the sea. Then it took on a semblance of a ghost. But ice and ghosts don't stalk about on cold arctic beaches in the middle of the day.

"Bears!"

All his life Rudd had longed to see a real polar bear. Those in the zoo were such sloppy, sluggish creatures that he wanted to have a look at a wild one in his native haunts just to prove they could have some real pep under the right conditions.

His thrill soon gave way to dismay when he realized how lacking he was in firearms. A rifle

BEARS!

would have been too heavy to have lugged all the way. His and Boggs' only weapon was a small .38 automatic revolver brought along for defense only in case wolves should be met. Captain Pike had declared bears would not be encountered along here this time of the year.

Rudd drew the small gun from its holster. Its magazine was full and he had twenty additional rounds in his belt. But the bullets looked so insignificant compared to the huge animals on the beach that Rudd's heroism oozed a bit. If the bears proved to be in a hostile mood there was no reason to suppose they would not attack both the men. And even if they were only examining the strange smells and tracks left by the expedition it was likely they would resent intrusion by the two explorers.

The first thing to do was to warn Boggs. If the poor wretch awoke to find himself looking into the dripping jaws of a full-grown polar bear he would probably die of fright. A chuckle escaped Rudd as he pictured such a scene.

He made most of the descent at a trot. Danger spurred him on. Also there was the fact that the wind might shift any minute and give the bears notice that they were not alone.

To Rudd's horror he found the camp empty. He was afraid to call too loudly for Boggs. The bears might hear him. That the fireman had left precipi-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

tately was evidenced by the primus which had been extinguished by the tea boiling over. At first Rudd thought Boggs had seen the bears and become frightened. Then he saw footprints in the snow leading directly toward the beach. Unusual distance between each track showed that Boggs must have started off at a run whatever his destination. He was alone and unarmed!

"The poor boob!" exclaimed Rudd. "Has he gone insane?"

There was not a moment to be lost. Boggs must by this time have reached the bears. Indeed, they might have attacked him already. A polar bear will not eat human flesh unless well starved. But he will not hesitate to do murder with one blow of his powerful and sharp-clawed paws.

Rudd soon saw that by following Boggs' tracks he would be discovered by the bears before he could get close enough to them to take advantage of a surprise attack. While they were not visible from this point, he had marked their bearing by a large boulder emerging from the drifts just above the low shelf that limited the inner edge of the beach.

With the wind in his face, Rudd ran half crouching until he could fling himself breathless and with palpitating heart in the lee of the rock. The strain on his whole body had been so great that it was some minutes before he could recover sufficient strength to

BEARS!

struggle to his feet. He could hear a deep-chested snuffling not far from him, audible proof that the bears were still unaware of his approach.

Then, without warning, the air was split by the most unearthly scream he had ever heard. His heart stood absolutely still for at least five seconds, and he could feel the hair on the back of his neck rise ticklingly under his blanket shirt.

"Stop!" shrieked a voice. "Stop, I tell ye, or I'll—" the protests broke off into another scream that was blood-curdling.

As Rudd scrambled up to have a look his brain painted a picture of the helpless Boggs being torn limb from limb by at least a dozen long-fanged bears. In fact so frightful was the carnage suggested that Rudd could scarcely believe his eyes when he peeped over the upper edge of the boulder.

This boulder was balanced on the brink of a vertical bank about ten feet above the level of the beach. Boggs was backed up against this bank shaking in every limb. His face was the color of raw putty. Tears ran down his cheeks. His hands were outstretched beseechingly, and spasmodically he gave vent to hoarse sounds that were alternately pleading and threatening.

In front of Boggs, not ten yards away, stood a huge polar bear. On either side of her was a half-grown cub. The bear's long neck was stretched

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

toward the frantic Boggs and she sniffed loudly as if trying to find out what manner of strange animal it was that gave forth such extraordinary sounds.

"Stop! Don't! You—you— *I'll kill you!*" croaked Boggs in impotent terror.

Rudd dared not tell his comrade how near help was for fear of distracting the bear's attention. If she came close enough Rudd would have a chance to kill her despite the small size of his weapon. If he only wounded her, as would no doubt be the case if he fired at this distance, she would likely attack and probably kill both of them.

Slowly, deliberately, the bear advanced. The cubs, also sniffing loudly, followed cautiously at her heels. When she was not ten feet from the bank Boggs' fear turned suddenly to a ghastly hysteria. His screams rose to such a pitch that the cubs whimpered and growled. He waved his arms in the air and took a step toward the bear. This sign of hostility aroused her to action. She rose on her hind legs to a full ten feet and emitted a thundering roar that seemed to shake the ground. Towering above the hapless Boggs she waved her massive paws in a way that said as plainly as words: "Now, you wretch, I'm going to finish you off with one blow!"

Rudd's moment for action had come. Raising his automatic cautiously he rested upon the boulder, took careful aim at the bear's heart, and pulled the

BEARS!

trigger. Instantly the great animal clawed at her breast. Then she gave one throaty gulp, tottered, and fell back with a thud stone-dead. The two cubs did not wait to find out what had befallen their unfortunate mother, but dashed headlong down the beach and disappeared into the fastnesses of the bare hills beyond. Boggs stood transfixed. So far as he was concerned it was as if a bolt of lightning had come down from heaven and struck dead the wild animal that but a moment before would have eaten him alive. His expression was that of a man who has just awakened from a nightmare.

"Pretty good shot that, eh?" laughed Rudd from above him.

Boggs spun around; and, to Rudd's amazement, presented a face smeared with what appeared to be molasses. More curious even than this, he did not mention the bear but pointed tremblingly down the beach and wailed:

"Look what they've left us—look—from the *Erik*—look!"

Rudd then saw for the first time half buried in the blanketing snow, the confirmation of his worst fears.

CHAPTER IX

TREACHERY

A VERY substantial cache of supplies had been left by the *Erik*. There were at least sixty cases of tinned and preserved foods of various kinds. Among them were four barrels of salt beef and two score five-gallon tins of kerosene. Several cases of pemmican had been broken open by the bears; also two large buckets of molasses. Apparently the whole cache had been in process of demolition when Boggs arrived. Splintered wood lay about, scattered by mighty blows from the animals' paws. Small cans of vegetables were rolled into the snow. One keg marked "pickles," weighing at least fifty pounds, had been picked up and hurled into the water.

"How in thunderation did you happen to come down here when you didn't have any gun?" asked Rudd.

Boggs, though still shaken by his harrowing experience, managed to get out that he thought he had sighted some of the crew. "Saw a thing moving about," he said, "and allowed as how one of the fellers was in the same fix with us. And when I

TREACHERY

heard them cases being moved around I was sure he was getting supper ready or something. So I just lit out. I jumped right down in the middle of them critturs—nearly landed on the madam's back!"

"But why didn't she lam you then and there?" asked Rudd in some amusement, despite Boggs' narrow escape.

"Well, she seemed to have her nose in that there molasses tin so she sorta let me be till she was finished."

"But she didn't, though," persisted Rudd.

"Jiggers, no! Soon as ever I'd start to beat it she'd stick up her head and growl in a way I took as orders to stay. So I stayed. An' when you come along she'd just finished the sweets and was about to amuse herself with a few parlor tricks over my corpse."

"Well, she didn't get you," laughed Rudd, "so what's the diff.? Our job now is to list this stuff for the Skipper, get a rest, and start back as soon as possible. Of course, we've got to make a good search for any message that may have been left, but in this mess we're not likely to find it easily."

"How come they to leave us grub, do you suppose?" asked Boggs thoughtfully. "I'd think that devil would jest as soon let us die now as later if he was going to swipe the ship."

Rudd shook his head. The mystery was deeper

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

than ever. Certainly if Mr. Menon committed the grave crime of stealing the *Erik* after bribing the crew to mutiny, he surely would not have incurred the extra risk of giving the deserted expedition means by which they might survive. Escape to the south was indubitably perilous, yet by no means impossible. And if but one man in the *Pole Star* party succeeded in reaching civilization, Mr. Menon would certainly be hanged.

"Doubtless they don't plan to come back," agreed Rudd, "or they wouldn't have left us all this stuff. But why they should ever give us even this fighting chance to live long enough to bring the law on them is too deep for me."

Boggs suddenly leaned over and snatched something out of the snow. "How 'bout this, sir?" He held aloft a ragged envelope. Rudd grabbed for it and then stopped with a grimace.

"Empty!" he wailed.

The envelope evidently had held some message. It was addressed to Captain Pike, under whose name was the inscription:

"To be opened by no one but the Skipper."

"I don't believe Mr. Menon would have had the impudence to call him 'Skipper,' commented Rudd. "Looks to me as if there's the hand of some one else in this mystery."

Prompted by the utmost curiosity both began a

TREACHERY

systematic search of the cache for some vestige of the note that must have been inclosed in the envelope. Their efforts were rewarded by only two scraps of paper, both written upon. On one was the half sentence: "*the Erik has unfortunately been crushed—*" on the other were only the words "*terrible fate.*"

"Looks as if they had either got into some sort of trouble with the ship," concluded Rudd after studying the remnants; "or else this is part of a fake message composing a lie that excuses the ship's departure."

"But there ain't no reason for them leaving food if the ship was busted up," reasoned Boggs very truly. "They'd either get blown out to sea and all bust up together; or else they'd have left some men here to look after the cache. It's scullduggery plain enough, and this what we've found is just a sample of a big lot of guff they expected us to swallow."

Rudd was of a mind to accept Boggs' version of the note except that he could not yet reconcile any sort of criminality on the part of the First Officer with the undeniable humanity of his leaving a good supply of provisions where he knew they would be found.

"There's nothing to do now but camp and get ourselves into shape for the trek back to the *Pole Star*,"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

asserted Rudd. "You turn to and skin the bear and I'll rig up a shelter."

So while Boggs was busy stripping the fine pelt off the animal, Rudd built four walls out of packing cases. Over the top he spread a tarpaulin which must have covered the cache at first. It was badly torn in places where the bears had raked it off, but by means of palm and needle, which he carried in his knapsack, temporary patches were made. He added heavy boulders to weight the improvised roof in case another gale should arise.

Boggs brought the skin over just as Rudd had ingeniously arranged a door by taking a smaller case from near the bottom of one of the walls.

"Makes a fine bed," said Boggs, with a much pride as if he had shot the animal himself. "I've slept on 'em before. It's the only large hide except the musk ox that can be used without having its hair come out all over everything."

"Sure will," assented Rudd. "Now you gather some ice and cut us off a steak and we'll have a real feed. None of this tinned stuff when there's fresh meat on hand. I'll go back after the stove."

"Steak nothing!" spouted Boggs. "Tongue and brains is what we want. Finest bits you've ever tasted. Only remember, the liver of a bear is poison and the hanks is tough."

Half an hour later, filled to bursting with stew and

TREACHERY

soup, both stretched themselves on the deliciously soft skin. For twenty-four hours neither had slept, and pure muscular exhaustion had numbed their nerves to every anxiety about the future.

"Suppose them bears come back," suggested Boggs.

"Let 'em come," murmured Rudd sleepily. "They could bite my foot off and I'd never know it!"

The sun had got well around into the north before either awoke. Boggs stirred first and started the stove. By the time the water was boiling he had sliced up some more of the bear meat and was about to drop it in when Rudd came to and stopped him.

"How about a can of beans?"

"Is it all right to take 'em?" asked Boggs eagerly.

"It has to be. I can't look a piece of bear meat in the face after that gorge we just had," declared Rudd with emphasis.

Boggs heartily agreed.

Before packing up they made a careful count of the cache and listed them as follows:

- 20 cases tinned meats
- 18 cases pemmican
- 4 cases preserved milk
- 1 crate dehydrated vegetables
- 200 gallons of kerosene, in 5-gallon tins
- 1 keg of pickles
- 10 damaged receptacles of molasses, butter, and sugar.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"It's funny they didn't leave us any ammunition," observed Rudd, "we'll never last on this preserved stuff. If we don't die of starvation, we'll all have scurvy before the winter is over."

"Maybe they figured we'd shoot—" suggested Boggs, "shoot them murderers if they was to come back."

"Sounds reasonable," began Rudd and broke off suddenly. "Hey, what's this?"

He held up an envelope similar to that which had been addressed to Captain Pike. Though damp with snow it was quite undamaged and evidently contained a folded paper. It was sealed and bore the legend:

"FOR MR. R. CAVERLY."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" blurted Rudd. "They certainly had their nerve to leave a sealed note for one of our party, particularly when Mr. Menon knew I had been watching Reggie's friendliness with him."

"How about opening it?" said Boggs. "Maybe we'll find out where the ship is."

"Sure," said Rudd and began to tear the envelope's corner. Abruptly he stopped. The realization had flashed into his mind that Mr. Menon was not such a fool as this. If he were going to leave some word for Reggie that would permit the lad to gain any

TREACHERY

advantage over the rest of the party, he surely would take a more secret means than an obvious note that Reggie might be made to relinquish by force.

"Guess I'll wait," Rudd explained. "I don't believe there's anything we could get from this letter unless we watch Reggie read it. His behavior might then prove a clue to what's up. Anyway it's a good one on him if he was planning to help Mr. Menon pull off his coup and then got left behind. What?"

"Say, young fellow," grinned Boggs, "ye've got a mind like Sherlock Holmes!"

The start was made under lowering skies with every evidence of more snow. But it was important to get back to the others, and as more food could be taken along, a night camp could be made if necessary. Boggs put together a small sledge from one of the cases, which enabled them to take half the bearskin and some of the frozen flesh.

The return was without incident except that Boggs nearly broke his neck down a small glacial tongue they had to cross. He was marching ahead of Rudd dragging the sledge. Suddenly he disappeared. Rudd leaped forward and almost dived into a crevasse which had been concealed by a bridge of rotten snow. Luckily the towing lanyard was wrapped around Boggs' wrist. The sledge caught on a small pinnacle and left him dangling in mid-air, the dark and cavernous depths of the yawning well below

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

him. Rudd quickly cut a pair of foot braces in the ice and hauled Boggs out by a straight back lift.

"Jumpin' cats!" groaned Boggs when he scrambled on to the snow. "What's a-goin' to hit me next?"

"Next!" laughed Rudd. "If we all had luck like yours there wouldn't be a poor man among us."

"Gee, and ye'd have to have luck if the devil was as hot on your trail as he is on mine!" lamented the calamity-stricken Boggs with a sad wag of his head.

They found the *Pole Star* in her little cove where they had left her. There were no signs of life about her.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted Rudd. The tiny flattie was tied up astern of the *Pole Star*, without which it would be impossible to reach her.

"Heads up!" bawled Boggs. "We're back."

But no answer. The boat lay silent and deserted. No welcoming sound or movement came from her cabin or deck.

"Say," said Boggs in an awed voice, "my luck's held twice; this is the third crack. We're hoodooed, and now's the end of everything. They've gone, too, an' left us—just us."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Rudd, and began taking off his boots. "I'm going to swim out to her."

"What!" shouted the horrified Boggs.

CHAPTER X

NO ESCAPE

RUDD had every intention of making the swim if necessary. While the water was icy and surfaced with half an inch of snow slush, he felt his vitality would enable him to cover the hundred yards to the flattie before he should become too numbed. From the flattie the *Pole Star* could be reached with ease.

However, he was quick enough to grasp a fact the slower Boggs had not yet noted. If every one were gone *how did it happen the flattie had been left at the Pole Star?* Some one must be aboard and hiding below, without doubt watching the newcomers. If this person saw Rudd starting to swim out, whoever it was would undoubtedly make his presence known in time to save the lad from his hazardous plan.

"I'll have a change of clothes when I get aboard," Rudd announced, in a voice loud enough to be heard on the motor boat.

"'Tain't possible!" groaned Boggs. "A man'd never live in that ice water."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Pooh! I'll be out there before I've had a chance to chill through!"

But Rudd's bluff was without results. The *Pole Star* lay still and dead. The flattie swung around her with a passing breath of air. Even the dark water seemed lifeless with its reflection of the leaden sky overhead. The mist and snow-shrouded hills were a fit background for tragedy.

"Here goes!" said Rudd with a shiver. He waded out several steps then flung himself heroically into the icy bath. First shock of it struck him like a blast of dynamite. Every nerve in his body leaped to the impact of terrific cold. His muscles fairly burned with energy so violently imparted to them by the biting stimulation of the iced brine.

Rudd fully realized he must make the best of this first burst of strength. Although he was striking out with the vicious speed of a trained swimmer he already felt the numbing effect of the cold. His shoulder joints began to lose sensation. His arms became heavy, lifeless lumps of dead flesh and bones. His lungs seemed bound by invisible chains that drew tighter at every stroke.

Poor Boggs stood on the beach and wrung his hands. Rudd had become his one hope of escape from the terrors of the arctic. If anything befell his resourceful companion it would mean the end of Boggs' already very shaky confidence in the future.

NO ESCAPE

At last he saw Rudd reach the flattie. That the boy was pretty well done up was evidenced by the unsuccessful effort he made to haul himself aboard.

"Heave 'round!" Boggs suddenly bawled. "You got 'em, mate!"

This encouragement had the desired effect. With a desperate yank Rudd hauled his frozen body high enough to rest it upon the flattie's stern. A moment later he was aboard her, pounding his thighs and swinging his arms like a windmill around his icicled head.

As soon as he felt the blood come tingling back into his hands and feet, he pulled the flattie ahead and boarded the *Pole Star*. He was positive he would find some one aboard. Else how did the flattie happen to be there? She was the only means of landing.

The cabin was empty. To his shout no one answered from the dark engine room. But just as he was about to climb back into the cabin for a change, he noticed something white on the engine room ladder. Leaning down he saw it was a burnt-out candle. The wick had fallen over in a dripping pool of paraffin.

"Gorry!" he exclaimed. "Might have burned the boat up. I wonder—" He struck a match. "Well, I'll be—" His words were cut short by a shiver not of cold but dismay. At his feet, sprawled over

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

the engine, lay the body of Reginald Caverly! Blood trickled from a wound in his temple and ran in a ghastly crimson smear down his pale face.

Rudd drew back horrified. "Has he killed himself?" was his first shuddering thought. Caverly's suffering on the trip up and during the storm on the *Pole Star* might well have led him to commit such a dreadful deed. Rudd felt the lad's wrist. There was no pulse.

"Poor Boggs!" Rudd could not help muttering. "He'll never stand this latest tragedy." Then Rudd realized how cold he was himself. A sudden weakness came over him. He found to his surprise he could just drag himself clear of the engine room. On deck the raw air revived him sufficiently to permit him to make his way to the cabin where he got out of his dripping breeches and into a warm outfit. He started the primus and put on tea to boil. Then he returned for Reggie. "Can't leave the poor fellow there," he told himself in an effort to overcome the loathing he felt at having to touch a dead body.

Despite Caverly's light weight Rudd had considerable difficulty getting him out of the tiny hatch. When he finally succeeded he again experienced the faintness he had felt on his first visit. "Why, that's not my swim making me ill!" he exclaimed. "Must be something down there." He stuck his nose over

NO ESCAPE

the hatch. "By Jove, it is!" The acrid fumes of an upset fire-extinguisher bit into his nostrils.

With this discovery he tore back Reggie's shirt and put his ear to the white chest. "Alive!" he shouted, and hustled his shipmate's unconscious form aft. In the cabin he drew off Reggie's boots and rolled him into a bunk. Exactly what medical treatment was needed he did not know. The temple wound he now saw was but a slight cut, done no doubt when Reggie fell.

"By the way," Rudd wondered, "what might he have been doing down there, anyway?" Rudd's delight at finding his shipmate alive was short-lived when he realized how suspicious the boy's presence in the engine room would look to any one who knew the circumstances of the trip.

With the aid of a lantern he inspected the engine. He immediately found the extinguisher and threw it on deck. By opening the hatch full width the noxious fumes escaped and pure air flooded the compartment.

"Aha!" Rudd exclaimed, when he saw a wrench and pliers lying by the carburetor. "Been trying to fix her, have you?"

He leaned over for a better look, and lifted the carburetor cover which seemed loose. To his amazement the missing float was there and in place!

"The lying scoundrel!" blurted Rudd.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Then his brain began to work full speed. He already had the note addressed to Reggie. And now he had this final damning bit of evidence to convict the rogue with. If used circumspectly, the two might be combined to earn a full confession of the mystery.

A shout interrupted him. Sticking his head through the hatch he saw Captain Pike and Dr. Barlow rounding the little point of land at the northern edge of the cove.

"Hello, boys, are you back?" called the skipper.

"Just are!" admitted Boggs in a tone not too loud to hide the melancholy of his soul.

Rudd lost not a second jumping into the flattie and pulling for the beach. He got there just in time to hear Boggs say: "And she was at least fifteen feet high but I was a-goin' to crack her over the head when Mr. Winters came alone with his gun and beat me to it!"

"Yes," added Rudd, "Boggs' cruelty to bears ought to be reported to the S. P. C. A. Why, he was positively swearing at the lady when I arrived!"

"But the ship?" interposed Dr. Barlow. "Did you get the carburetor float?"

"She's left us!" cried Boggs before Rudd could speak. "Left us to die up here in this ice box! Left us—" He broke off into a flood of nautical

NO ESCAPE

profanity that left no doubt in the minds of his hearers that the *Erik* had certainly gone home.

"Oh, she'll be back," boomed the Skipper. "That idiot Menon probably persuaded young Norman to take her out when the gale came on and he'll bring her back soon as the weather gives him a chance."

"But this letter?" protested Rudd, and drew the empty envelope from his pocket. "What do you make of that?" Rudd was determined not to launch all his thunderbolts at once.

"Just explanation," averred Dr. Barlow who, like Captain Pike, refused to accept Rudd's theory that the *Erik* had gone for good.

Rudd next presented the scraps of paper on which were the fateful fragments, "the *Erik* has, unfortunately been crushed—" and "terrible fate."

"That's all right," laughed Dr. Barlow. "The gale must have brought some heavy floes into the harbor and pushed her towards the beach. To avoid being wrecked Menon took her out. The 'terrible fate' part of it refers to what might happen to us if the *Erik* couldn't get back and we had no food."

"That's the Chief Engineer's handwriting, too," put in the Captain. "He's the only one who'd dare call me 'Skipper.' And, moreover, he wouldn't have written if everything wasn't all right. He's been like a brother to me for forty years."

Rudd's face fell. What *could* he do to make these

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

men realize that they were being tricked? Surely, they must give credence to his irrefutable proof of Reggie's guilt.

As if reading his thoughts, Dr. Barlow suddenly changed the subject with, "Where's our good mate, Reggie?"

" 'Good mate!' " echoed Rudd aghast. "Why—Why——"

"Yes," explained the Doctor. "When we started after caribou to-day, he volunteered to put in his time on the engine. Said he could fix it, he was sure."

"He fixed it, too," Rudd said, quietly. "He found the float."

"Hooray!" shouted Boggs, "then we can run round to the cache."

"I thought he might," went on Dr. Barlow. "He's got determination, that boy."

Rudd turned away hurt. What was the use of trying to go on when his seniors seemed determined not to perceive anything but good in those who were so obviously plotting disaster. Then he abruptly realized that what he had said to Boggs about not giving up without a fight applied to himself as well. Also Reggie must have medical aid at once.

"Before you go to him," he told Dr. Barlow, after explaining Reggie's accident, "I want to ask you

NO ESCAPE

about this other note we found at the cache addressed to Reggie. I suggest it might be opened in the presence of some of us to make sure it conceals nothing we ought to hear."

Dr. Barlow gave Rudd an angry look. "Really, Rudd, you are the most suspicious young cuss I've ever known. If it weren't for your undeniable courage, I'd say that you were jealous of your companion's ability to make something out of himself despite his physical inferiority."

"It's not that, and you know it, sir!" blurted Rudd. "And I believe the time is coming shortly when you will take back what you imply about me."

"Come, come, old man," the Doctor soothed him. "There may be something in your detective ability after all. For your sake, I'll see that Reggie reads the note before us."

Reggie's illness proved to be only a temporary, and by no means a serious, touch of asphyxiation from the fumes he had encountered in the engine room. His first words when he came to were in exultation at finding the float.

"Don't know why we didn't see it the other day," he said weakly.

"Where'd ye find it?" asked Boggs.

Reggie hesitated the fraction of a second—a fact not overlooked by Rudd who was watching him

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

closely. "Why—why, right in the box of spare parts where it was supposed to be."

"Humph," growled Boggs. "That's queer—I took every part out of that box the day we lost the float."

"I did, too," Rudd wanted to add, but held his tongue.

"Never mind that," interrupted Dr. Barlow. "The float's found, and we are your debtors, Caverly. Now we want to ask you a favor. Rudd found a note addressed to you at the cache left by the *Erik*. There was also one for the Captain, but bears destroyed its content. Because of the perilous situation in which we find ourselves we are anxious to learn what your note contains."

Reggie took the envelope and looked at the four faces before him. Boggs and Rudd were undisguisedly hostile, each for his own private reasons. The Skipper had lit his pipe and was beaming rather indifferently over the smoky bowl. Dr. Barlow smiled encouragingly and gave every evidence of confidence that what the note contained would only confirm his faith in the boy.

"Is—is there any hurry about it?" asked Reggie lamely, and much to Rudd's delight.

"Hurry?" Dr. Barlow seemed not to understand. "Open it, lad, and let's find out what the game is."

Reggie's face blanched. Confronted with the

NO ESCAPE

necessity of opening the letter he gave every evidence of being trapped. He tore the envelope with trembling fingers. He withdrew the paper as if his life or death sentence might be written upon it—which indeed it might be, thought Rudd. Then in a flash his whole expression changed as he read:

“To R. C.

“Hope you will not be in a FURY at our leaving.—
M.”

“Let me see it,” demanded the Skipper. “It’s in the handwriting of that scoundrel Menon.” He glanced over the sheet. “Looks all right. Wonder what his idea was in putting ‘fury’ in capital letters. How about it, Caverly?”

Rudd glanced over the Skipper’s thick shoulder and saw the word FURY standing out in high print above all the other words.

“Joking, I guess,” laughed Reggie nervously. The reaction from his dread had patently upset him.

Rudd turned away. He wanted to think. The note and Reggie’s strange behavior further strengthened his conviction that their whole series of misfortunes thus far had been carefully planned ahead of time. Only by watching Reggie carefully could the party possibly guard against further catastrophe. And Rudd felt that he alone could do this, as the others had come to trust Reggie implicitly; more-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

over, he had thought of a scheme that might trap Reggie if the Doctor would only agree to let him try it.

The Doctor did agree, not because he thought so much of Rudd's plan, as because he, too, fortunately, had not missed the anxiety Reggie had displayed over reading his note in public.

CHAPTER XI

RUDD WINS

“**Y**OU see, sir,” Rudd explained to the Doctor, “I surprised him time and time again in company with Mr. Menon. If there was a real scheme to steal the ship and desert us, Caverly might well have been made a party to it, and by stealing the carburetor float succeed in keeping us here while the *Erik* got away.”

“It doesn’t sound reasonable,” countered the Doctor, “first because I don’t believe Menon would have left the food if he had intended to abandon our party; and second, because I can’t possibly see the point in Caverly’s trying to stop us here at his own risk.”

“Anyway, sir, if I’m right the best thing to do is to force his hand. You are familiar with what it means to winter here. Let this sink into Reggie’s bean and then give him a chance to get away with the boat. He’ll jump at it if he has any idea of catching the *Erik*.”

At lunch that day Dr. Barlow broached the details of their future. “I find that we have food for four months,” he began. “This could be stretched

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

into six or even eight if we go on half rations. Our best bet, however, is to collect enough meat to last us through the winter."

"Done!" agreed the Skipper roundly. "I've had a scurvy party before, and I don't want any of it again."

"Bear's fine!" observed Boggs. "Let me go after them."

Rudd chuckled. "Or they after you?"

The Doctor held up his hand. "Now, let's stick to the point," said he, "we've got to look our future in the face. We are in approximately seventy degrees north latitude. Already we are nearing the end of July. In August the sun begins to set. Not long afterwards darkness will come with winter blizzards. I know by experience the temperature goes down to more than sixty below zero and stays there for weeks at a time."

"Righto!" boomed the Skipper, with the emphasis of a man who had put in six black winters north of the Arctic Circle.

"The *Pole Star* will take us but a few hundred miles on the fuel we have. Which is not enough to enable us to reach the natives either in Pons Inlet on Baffin Land or in Coronation Gulf to the westward. If we go south, there is less chance of finding game. If we go north, we may be frozen in before we can possibly lay up enough meat for

RUDD WINS

the winter. In consequence our only hope is to stay where we are and collect game and skins against eight months of terrible cold. As soon as the straits break out in the early summer, we may be able to sail clear of Baffin Bay and be picked up by some whaler."

"Scarce these days," observed the Skipper. "Whaling has pretty much gone out of fashion with the cheap oil on every market."

"Quite right, Pike. But we have to weigh our chances in every direction and select that course offering the greatest hope of success."

"How about the cache?" ventured Reggie.

"We can build some sort of sledge with the scraps of lumber we have and bring supplies across the peninsula."

"But don't we have to use every stick for a house?" asked Rudd.

"Not at all. Both the Skipper and I can build Eskimo igloos when the snow gets properly packed. Until then we should center our efforts on a stone structure, much of the type the North Greenland people use. With mud and moss we can make a very habitable shelter."

"Ain't no use," whimpered the dreary Boggs.

Dr. Barlow turned on him with fire in his eye. "If I hear any whining in this crowd," he said sternly, "I'm going to treat it as I would the same

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

thing in a child. I'm going to turn to and whip it out of the guilty one!"

"Well put," agreed the Skipper. "I'll be there myself with a good stiff seaboot's toe!"

"Speaking of boots," put in Rudd, "oughtn't we to have some skin ones like the Eskimos? I doubt if these leather ones will stand the cold."

Dr. Barlow nodded. "I was coming to that. Musk-ox hide from the animal's foreleg makes most excellent footgear. Captain Pike and I spotted what we think was a herd this morning and plan to organize the hunt right away. As we have no dogs it will take the whole crowd of us. Except—" He looked meaningly at Rudd—"I think we might leave Caverly here. He still feels a little low; and he might straighten up the boat a bit."

Boggs looked askance at this suggestion, but there was nothing he could say; and if his beloved Rudd was agreed, he felt it ought to be all right.

After a good meal of ptarmigan, which the Doctor had bagged, and hard bread dipped in the gravy, the four set off. Dr. Barlow's scheme was to surround the herd in case it broke, and so be sure of getting at least one or two of the animals. Captain Pike and Boggs set off north, the Doctor and Rudd south, all armed with rifles, and agreed to meet near the base of a conspicuous plateau about five miles east.

RUDD WINS

As soon as the Doctor and Rudd were out of sight around the first point the latter turned off up the hill. "I'll wait up there, sir," said Rudd, "as you suggest. And if anything strange seems to be happening on the boat I can signal you."

This had seemed a foolhardy scheme at first. Dr. Barlow pointed out that if Reggie did plan to attempt an escape on the *Pole Star* he might get away before Rudd could possibly stop him.

"I doubt it, sir," Rudd had protested. "The anchor is heavy; and by the time he either hoisted it or slipped the cable I could be opposite him on the beach and cover him with my rifle. He wouldn't dare go, knowing what a shot I am."

So the Doctor had assented; and now Reggie was to be given his chance to do with the *Pole Star* what Rudd believed Mr. Menon had done with the *Erik*, namely, steal her and abandon his friends.

Rudd stationed himself in the lee of a granite shelf where he could see the *Pole Star's* decks without being detected. Behind him to the eastward stretched a rolling snowy plain ending in a precipitous bluff at the foot of which were the musk oxen. While he had never seen any live ones, he knew this species to be arctic sheep, in appearance not unlike the buffalo. Their long black hair dragged the ground, and their meat was highly prized by the natives.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

For a monotonous hour he sat. Once or twice, to warm himself, he trotted up and down on the side of the hill, away from the cove. But he was afraid to let the launch long out of his sight; his responsibility was too great.

He contemplated the arctic waste spread before his eyes. The mist and fog had lifted, permitting a good view of the land about. The dull sky overhead was so low it seemed as if one could reach up and touch it. Little scurries of powdery snow danced across the level spaces and stumbled and scattered over patches of coarse arctic grass that had struggled into being earlier in the month. It was a dead land. Snow was its shroud; the howl of the wind and the grinding of the floes, its endless funeral dirge. Great black boulders dragged down by prehistoric glaciers stood out here and there like gigantic tombstones. Not a living thing stirred. Not a sound arose save those of the ice-girt straits and the sigh of the cold wind creeping out of the polar sea.

Rudd shuddered. "Gosh! A whole winter of this!" he groaned. Then suddenly he rose to his knees. On the opposite side of the depression just south of him, not a thousand yards away, appeared a dozen dark balls. At first they looked perfectly round; then he saw that each had a set of short

RUDD WINS

legs nearly hidden in hair, and he realized they were musk oxen.

"Too long for a shot," he muttered. "I wonder—" It was a terrible strain not to make for the game. The wind was just right so that he could have a good shot; and there was shelter in the way of gullies and boulders right up to the pasture where the herd fed. But Rudd's conscience would not quite permit him to leave his post of duty.

"How about the Doctor?" he thought, and with his glass studied the route by which his companion had disappeared. Then, to his satisfaction, he saw Dr. Barlow emerge from an almost invisible cup in the plain and begin to stalk the oxen.

Rudd watched him with admiration. The Doctor had hunted in the Rockies, in South Africa, China, and Thibet, and knew his technic like a master sportsman. He was not seventy-five yards from his quarry when he lay flat for an opening salvo at the unsuspecting animals. A puff of smoke showed he had fired, followed by a distant crack some moments later.

Instantly the musk oxen threw up their heads and whirled into formation. Rudd had heard of the hollow square they make when attacked. Now he saw one in actuality. Five bulls arranged themselves in a semicircle facing the direction from which the report had come. Behind them were the cows and

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

the calves. None moved; but all waited for the enemy to continue his attack. One wavered—he had been hit—then staggered to his knees, and lay down quietly in the white snow. The others gave no sign of perturbation, except that the four remaining bulls opened their spacing sufficiently to cover that left by the first victim.

Rudd waited expectantly for the next one to fall. “Why doesn’t he shoot?” he cried aloud. “It’s a cinch at that range!”

But no shot came. Through his glass Rudd could see the Doctor working at his rifle. Evidently it had jammed. And while he wrenched at the operating lever the unruffled bulls stood their ground. Suddenly, to Rudd’s horror, they began to advance.

“Jiminy crickets and bear-cats!” he muttered.

He would have shouted a warning, and actually started to do so only to check himself. The Doctor would hardly hear him at this distance in the first place; in the second place, Reggie would undoubtedly catch the cry and thus put an end to the scheme to discover his villainy.

“Guess I’ll have to help him out,” concluded Rudd. He realized now that the musk oxen had sighted the Doctor. Like many other peaceful creatures they would leave another undisturbed, or even retreat, so long as they were not attacked. But let their fighting ire once get up and even the dreaded wolf-

RUDD WINS

pack found them a worthy foe. Already one of the bulls had broken into a trot and with lowered head was brandishing his long curved horns defiantly.

Rudd shot a glance at the *Pole Star*. The Doctor's peril certainly justified his taking a chance in leaving his lookout. Instantly his eyes widened with emotion at what he saw. The *Pole Star* was under way! While he had been watching Doctor Barlow and the oxen, the sole occupant of the launch had apparently managed to free her from her anchorage. A light puffing sound drifted up. Her engine was going.

Rudd's heart sank. On one hand his best friend was in imminent danger of being gored to death by the enraged bulls; on the other he saw escaping the party's last connection with the civilized world and home.

His theory had, therefore, been correct. But there was no joy in the triumph.

CHAPTER XII

SUSPENSE

NEVER before in his life had Rudd been forced to do such quick thinking. Many a man would have been too stunned by his frightful dilemma to act at all. But Rudd had that happy gift of facing danger with full control of his faculties. Now his brain seemed afire. In a flash he saw the dreadful consequences of losing the launch. To be sure a certain amount of caribou and musk ox meat might be secured on the peninsula. It was even possible that enough sea birds could be snared Eskimo-fashion to eke out a subsistence until spring. But the *Pole Star* stood for a means by which walrus and seal could be pursued. These animals were really the mainstay of the natives, and must certainly play a large part in the health and safety of the little expedition. The sea at certain seasons abounded with them; whereas the barren land could at best support but a few scattered herds of grass-eating animals. Further, when the rigors of the terrible winter had been survived, there yet remained the vital need of some means of transportation south. Men could walk; but men's food must

SUSPENSE

be carried. And a man cannot, in the north country, lug enough provisions and equipment to last him more than a week or so. No timber for sledges was available outside that comprising the spars and extra decking of the *Pole Star*. And even if there were, it was exceedingly doubtful whether the inexperienced members of the party could survive a trip long enough to take them into safety. Franklin's men with the best preserved food and specially built sledges had starved and frozen to death in this very area a generation before. Only by the *Pole Star* would it be possible to reach waters where ships might be found. Only by the *Pole Star* would meat and reasonable comfort be assured. Only by the *Pole Star* could Rudd and his companions have even a fighting chance to win that life we all hold so dear—home and warmth and comfort, with all the daily joys of friends and hot meals, and books, and beds, and clothes. All these glaring details gripped Rudd's mind like a stroke of prophetic foresight. And he valued them with a flood of emotion that only a man who has been desperately cold and hungry can understand.

But in the next moment a wave of loyalty had swept all human selfishness aside. Dr. Barlow was his friend, his shipmate, his counselor. Dr. Barlow had time and again in his quiet way shown Rudd the road a real man should travel. Through all the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

trying days of the departure, the storm, even the present danger and anxiety, the Doctor had never wavered from his smiling acceptance of the best that was in his comrades, and had refused steadfastly to subscribe to any thought or word that belittled the value of good motives and worthy actions. With no shade of hesitation Rudd saw that to desert Dr. Barlow in his mortal peril was unthinkable.

"But isn't there a way to handle both?" was the question that thrust itself like a red-hot poker into his mind.

With swift judgment he measured the distance between himself and the motor boat. "Four hundred yards, I'd say," he muttered, and snapped up the sight bar. While the *Pole Star* was not yet moving forward, Reggie was visible at the wheel working the clutch back and forth. This with the swirling water under her stern showed that he was maneuvering her around to get her bow pointed toward the opening.

In desperation Rudd wavered. At this range he might wound Reggie, or he might kill him. He could not stomach the thought of murdering his fellow-man.

"It's to save the others," a tiny voice urged him.

"But suppose he really isn't stealing the boat," whispered his conscience.

Then Fate played into his hands. Reggie was

SUSPENSE

apparently having trouble with the clutch. He leaned over until only his shoulder was visible above the coaming of the boat. Rudd glanced around to see how Dr. Barlow was faring. The nearest bull was still twenty yards away. The Doctor had risen and was standing his ground staunchly. Rudd swung his rifle to his cheek, took a long breath and drew a bead on Reggie's shoulder. His hand was as steady as if he was shooting on the rifle range at school. His narrowed lids did not quiver. He fired. Instantly he pumped another cartridge into the chamber. One more shot, he felt, even if he missed, would certainly discourage the rather timorous Reggie from continuing his foolhardy attempt. But just as he sighted for another round, he saw the lad in the boat rise slowly to a standing position, swing his hand up to the shoulder which had been exposed, and then collapse in the cockpit. The bullet had struck its mark!

"Winged him!" cried Rudd, as he turned to tackle his second problem. "Hope I can do as well next shot."

Again he set the sight, this time for 1,000 yards. Dr. Barlow was so close to the nearest musk ox that there was great risk in aiming too near him. The best Rudd could hope to do was to stop the attack long enough to let him run closer and finish the other animals off at shorter range.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

He lay down in the snow and repeated his practiced method of taking a long breath, holding it and firing by squeezing his whole hand rather than pulling the trigger outright. He whipped his binoculars up the instant following the discharge and was gratified to see the attacking bull toss his head in the air—probably startled at the shriek of the passing bullet—followed by a spurt of powdery snow just beyond him.

Rudd leaped to his feet and tore down the slope. Before he had covered two hundred yards the bull had again turned his attention to the Doctor. This time he was joined by the three others who had become emboldened by their leader's effrontery. Twice Rudd dropped and fired before he was close enough to make a really good shot. The noise of the bullets and the explosions coming closer every minute began now to occupy the herd's attention sufficiently to let Dr. Barlow beat a retreat. Only a nearby boulder offered any sort of safety. He dashed to this and scrambled up.

Rudd counted as he ran. "Four—five—Jiminy, I've got to begin to do business now—only three rounds left!"

There was no use in his trying to take cover. The bulls had discovered him and almost immediately decided he belonged to the same clan as their other disturber who had perched himself on

SUSPENSE

the boulder. However, they didn't make for Rudd but stood snorting and shaking their ugly horns in the air.

"Careful, old fellow!" shouted the Doctor, when Rudd was within three hundred yards of the ferocious group. "The cows won't hurt you, but these devils are out for blood!"

"Got only three cartridges left," replied Rudd, never taking his eyes off the bulls. "Got to get 'em—or they'll get me, and you too!"

"Wo—o—o—f! Waugh!" came from the massive leader at this interchange of human speech.

At fifty yards Rudd stopped and knelt. While his missiles would leave their rifle barrel at a velocity of nearly 3,000 feet a second, he knew the musk ox's skull was very thick, and its brain but an insignificant handful behind a thick barrier of bone. Every shot must kill or he was lost.

"Just above the eye!" cautioned the treed Doctor.

Rudd pulled. The leader whirled, his huge shaggy shoulders seemed to expand for an instant, his sharp horns lashed the air. Then he collapsed with an audible thud on the icy ground.

The Doctor waved his arm. "Splendid!" he cried.

Again Rudd fired; and the second animal rolled in convulsions near his brother, reddening the white snow with his life's blood.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd pumped the third cartridge in. The third bull stood ready to meet his fate, a black warrior of the wilderness, ready to avenge this singular death of his kind he had just witnessed. For a moment he wavered. He seemed to be listening; the scent of blood had crept into his nostrils. As a calf, learning the butchery of the arctic wolf, his mother had taught him to fear this odor. Now it brought terror to his heart. It meant death; and instinctively he dreaded death with a wild hysterical horror. Rudd could see his small close-set eyes, blood-shot with fury.

"Look out!" the Doctor yelled. But before the words had left his lips the bull had charged. Rudd did not lose his nerve. He aimed before he fired. Yet the extra tension of the moment, together with the bull's rapid movement, made a perfect shot nothing short of a miracle.

With a wild snort the bull paused and bit at his chest where the projectile had buried itself. For a few seconds it looked as if he were stopped. He leaped sidewise in pain and appeared to have forgotten the boy. Then, with what seemed to be almost a human scream of agony, he turned again upon Rudd.

The lad braced himself, gripping his empty smoking rifle like a club. "Well, here goes!" he muttered between clenched teeth. Little he knew what a fine sight he made at that instant—feet widespread, head up, face grim with determination to die gamely, if

SUSPENSE

die he must. Such is the heroism of the men we are breeding in our country to-day.

The bull ran with his head lowered to within a foot from the ground. In this way he could get his horns well under his victim; and, besides goring him, toss him aside to give time for another attack. It was thus the agile wolf could sometimes be defeated. But Rudd had no intention of being caught if he could possibly avoid it. Moving pictures of bull-fights had taught him that it was possible for a man to side-step under such circumstances swiftly enough to avoid the bull.

He failed. He could feel the beast's hot breath on his clenched hands when he struck. But the force with which he brought the heavy rifle down on his assailant's skull unbalanced him. His foot slipped in the snow and he was able only to hurl himself far enough aside to avoid the dagger-pointed horns before the hairy mass of living flesh and bone hurtled over him.

Frantically he struggled to regain his feet. A ponderous weight seemed to hold his legs. Over his shoulder he saw the massive animal had also stumbled and lay with haunches across his knees. But Rudd's fighting instinct would not let him give up even now. Expecting the infuriated beast to roll over and finish him off the next second he twisted himself around sufficiently to raise the rifle which he still

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

clutched. To his amazement the bull did not move. Only a convulsive quiver went through the creature's gigantic frame as proof that he had ever lived.

A cheery voice smote upon Rudd's ears. "How was that for a shot?" It was Dr. Barlow.

"You don't mean to say—!" gasped Rudd.

"I certainly do. Thought you might get into a jam like this when I saw you coming. You were too busy to notice that I was working with my gun the whole time you were shooting. Ejector lip broke and I had to jolt the cartridge out. Trouble was I knew I couldn't get in more than one shot so I waited until it was needed."

Rudd gave a great sigh of relief. "It certainly was needed; I'll say that!"

"All right!" the Doctor took his hand. "Let's call it square. We've managed to save each other's lives and we've laid in a nice little stock of meat and skins—about three thousand pounds, I make it. And we can finish off these cows at our leisure. They'll stick around."

Rudd began filling his magazine at once. "Let me—" he began. "No— Cæsar's ghost!" he broke off. "We can't stop. I forgot to tell you, I've shot Reggie!" He grabbed Dr. Barlow and started to haul him towards the cove. "I may have killed him!" he wailed. "Hurry!"

CHAPTER XIII

NO HOPE!

DR. BARLOW immediately conceded that the only thing to do was to make all haste back to the *Pole Star*. If Reggie were wounded badly he might not be able to manage the boat. She then would either drift ashore and be damaged beyond repair, or she might even be carried by the tide out through the entrance. As Reggie evidently planned to take the flattie with him there would be no way of retrieving her.

"You may have done right," said the Doctor. "But it still seems absolutely inconceivable that Caverly would be capable of carrying out such an iniquitous plan as you suspect him of."

Rudd stamped his foot to emphasize his protest. "But didn't I see him leaving?"

"Doubtless. Had you any reason to believe he wasn't just trying the engine? He worked very faithfully over it while you and Boggs were absent."

Rudd's feelings would not permit him to continue the discussion. Only events could prove whether or not he had made the terrible mistake of shooting his

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

own shipmate. Never will he forget that walk! One moment his legs wouldn't carry him fast enough toward the cove. The next, he felt like breaking and running away lest matters should turn out to show how culpable had been his misconception of Reggie's character.

At last the bordering height on the cove's lower edge was reached. Rudd could contain himself no longer. With his heart in his throat he dashed ahead. At the crest overlooking the water he stopped, gave one look, and turned with radiant face.

"I told you so!" he shouted.

Dr. Barlow joined him. The *Pole Star* was nowhere in sight!

"Told me so—" growled the Doctor, self-accusingly. "Well, you needn't be so all-fired chipper about it. You've probably wounded the lad and our boat is drifting out to sea with him."

"But look, sir! we can see the whole coast up and down."

"No, we can't at all. If she's beached, the launch will be found somewhere among those grounded floes above or below here. We've got to make a search, and in a hurry, too!"

But it was to no purpose. Careful investigation up and down the shore line in the vicinity of the cove failed to reveal any trace of the *Pole Star*.

"Guess you were right," Dr. Barlow finally ad-

NO HOPE!

mitted. "He must been only scratched by your bullet and went on out with the boat. And that means you were right about his stealing the carburetor float to keep us here. The scoundrel has sneaked his way up or down the coast so that he is out of sight by this time."

"Is there any use trying to catch him?" asked Rudd.

"Not in the least. He has fuel to run him a long way. And, unless something happens to his engine, there is no reason why he shouldn't be miles towards the *Erik* before we could get a start."

"But where do you suppose she is?"

"Don't know, unless Menon had some rendezvous settled upon before we left, as no doubt he had."

Rudd leaned forward suddenly and gripped his companion's wrist. "I've got it!"

"Got what?" The Doctor was beginning to respect Rudd's intelligence.

"The rendezvous! Don't you remember that note to Reggie we found at the cache? Didn't it have the word 'Fury' in capital letters?"

"Yes," said the Doctor with interest. "But I'm not the boy detective you seem to be. What about it?"

"Why he must have meant Fury and Hecla Straits! That's the shortest way out. He probably was going to take a look at the ice there, and if the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

passage seemed favorable would use that route. Reggie would receive word, as this proves he did, to meet the *Erik* either there or in Lancaster Sound the way we came in."

This explanation sounded reasonable enough to Dr. Barlow; and he later brought the Skipper around to the same way of thinking. That gentleman had brought back Boggs some hours later loaded down with two large strings of ptarmigan, four arctic hare, and a chest full of objurgations he heaped upon the unfortunate fireman's head at every step.

"You ought to have stayed home with your wife!" Rudd and the Doctor heard him roar a quarter of a mile away. "An old worthless fossil like you has no business going to sea!"

"But no guy can run races with rheumatiz!" wailed Boggs.

"Rheumatiz, my whiskers!" boomed the Skipper. "You're not old enough to have it. Why, here I am on the down-hill side of sixty and I can land a heaving line with the best of 'em!"

Even the news of the *Pole Star's* loss did not feaze the Skipper.

"Wasn't built right, anyway," he growled. "Her strakes'd made a good chicken coop for the missus, or a lobster pot. As for——"

"But man alive!" exclaimed the Doctor, "do you

NO HOPE!

realize that we're now absolutely cut off from every thing?"

"Yes," was the complacent reply. "'Tis pretty bad when you come to think of it. Fact, I ain't sure my 'baccy's going to last the winter through or not. Thank killicks, I brought that extra pound ashore with me! Foresight, I tell you. Don't ever let your luggage get separated."

Dr. Barlow could not restrain a laugh. "You do beat all, Pike! To the best of my knowledge, here we are facing death from starvation or scurvy or cold, or all three put together. And you stand there like a great big Santa Claus and lecture me about not getting separated from my tobacco!"

"Well, Barlow," retorted the old Skipper with a queer twitching motion of the whiskers that grew near the corner of his mouth, "this is about the fiftieth time I've come to the end of my rope in this life. And I'm calkulating to die yet at home in my bed from an overdose of vermifuge that old woman of mine is always giving me every time I sneeze."

"I hope you're right, Pike. I confess I feel pretty much the same way."

Boggs shrugged his shoulders meaningly. "I don't!" said he.

The Doctor laid his hand on the poor fellow's shoulder. "Boggs, you don't know the arctic if that's the way you feel. Look here." He led Boggs

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

to a small patch of ground on the sheltered southern side of a large rock. At that moment the sun's rays broke through the clouds and turned the gray snow to a myriad of sparkling diamonds. With his foot he brushed the flakes from some small twiglike vegetation that had been covered by the recent fall. "Look at that!"

Boggs opened his eyes in wonder. A cluster of yellow poppies, gleaming like gold in the warm sunlight, met his astonished gaze. He leaned over to touch them to be sure he was not dreaming.

"That's the arctic for you, Boggsy. Apparently dead and lifeless, nothing but cold and ice and snow; only endless darkness and winter. And yet if a man only knows where to look for it there is warmth and beauty."

Thus under the leadership of the resourceful and indomitable Doctor the little party set to work vigorously to make themselves comfortable and safe in preparation for the dark months ahead. There was no change from the original belief that the safest course would be to remain at this point and winter. When spring came a retreat south could be made with such equipment as had been wrought from natural sources. Animals would provide food and clothing. Their sinews could be stranded into thread. Bones and scraps of driftwood must be husbanded for sledge material.

NO HOPE!

"Don't you think we ought to move over to the cache?" Rudd suggested when a house site was being picked out.

"It would be more convenient," agreed the Doctor. "But my idea is to leave a note with the provisions in case the *Erik* returns. If we are looked for here, as is likely, we can have a cairn piled at some prominent point from which it may be seen by a passing vessel. Moreover, this is a sheltered spot and one likely to be sought by game in view of the meadowland behind us."

The house was finished after four days of hard work. It consisted of walls built of sandstone slabs selected from a talus slope under the protecting hill behind. By raking away gravel, advantage was taken of the slope to effect a semidugout. Then Boggs *tumped* in some extra broad pieces which were weighted on their outer edges so they would project several feet beyond the supporting wall. Three frozen musk ox hides served to complete the roof. Moss and mud formed an excellent plaster with which to seal the interstices between the rocks. And a portion of canvas brought from the cache formed a temporary door. Sleeping bags had of course been lost with the *Pole Star*, though their contained blankets had fortunately been brought ashore for drying. These spread upon the skins of musk ox and bear formed a bed of utmost luxury.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Captain Pike proved to be the most expert in preparation of hides. He taught Rudd to scrape all fat and tissue from their inner sides and then stake them out to dry. A few days of sunshine cured them sufficiently to make preservation successful. Tendons from the animals' backs were used to sew the thick material together.

"We're going to be up against it for fuel," said Rudd when he was making tea on the second morning. He and Boggs were taking turns at the very limited cooking. "That gallon of kerosene is nearly gone."

Boggs wrung his hands at the prospect of making the long trip across to the cache again for more oil.

Dr. Barlow poured himself a steaming cup and smiled his old cheering grin. "Remember that poppy, Boggs? Well, there's gold if you only look."

"But gold won't burn, sir!"

"No, but peat will."

Seizing a camp ax, the Doctor strode over to a small marshy spot at the edge of a fresh-water pool they had been using. With the skill of an adept he chopped out a hunk the size of a brick. He held it out to the wondering Boggs. "There's your gold," said he.

"That mud?"

"Yes, 'that mud.' Each year a thin crop of weeds and grass dies. In time the successive layers of

NO HOPE!

vegetable matter settle down and coagulate into a carboniferous matrix."

"Carbifferous what?" echoed Boggs.

"A mass of material composed almost entirely of carbon," explained the Doctor. "Eventually sand and dirt will be washed down upon it. Pressure will increase, age after age, until centuries hence coal will be formed. Our coal mines were all great peat bogs at one time. Some people, as in Ireland and Denmark, use little else than peat for fuel. I can dry this brick I have cut and burn it like coal."

Thus had the ingenious Doctor pointed the way to an unlimited supply of fuel. Another and deeper peat bed was discovered later, on the far side of the cove. And each member of the party took his turn cutting it and spreading the bricks on the rocks to dry. A small stove of flat stones was built and outdoor cooking began, much to the economy of the precious kerosene.

Lighting the rock house was another problem. There were no candles, and oil could not be wasted on the luxury of illumination. No one bothered much, however, until Captain Pike lost his jack-knife in the furs one evening while trying to shave off his tobacco plug. Next morning Boggs contributed to the public comfort by mashing up a quantity of suet he scraped from the musk ox

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

meat. Some twine provided a wick which he centered in half a dozen homemade candles he molded from the grease.

All this time hunting was the principal occupation. A meat cache was built from slabs similar to those in the house. Several raids from blue foxes had made this precaution necessary; but no wolves had as yet appeared.

At the end of the first week an expedition was organized to revisit the cache on the other side. Most of the food had to be brought over before autumn blizzards began; and all four of the men still felt remotely hopeful that either the *Erik* or the *Pole Star* would be heard from again.

Dr. Barlow had gone to the summit of the hill early the morning of departure for a look at the weather. He had arranged to signal to Rudd if conditions to the eastward looked too threatening to make the attempt, in which case postponement would be in order.

Rudd sat on a low stone bench just outside the hut. Boggs was repairing a hole in the sandstone stove. Captain Pike busied himself with cleaning a pair of fine caribou skins which had been secured the day before.

"There he goes," said Rudd, his eye screwed to his binoculars. "But what does he mean?" The signal arranged was one arm up meant that the

NO HOPE!

men could start. Both arms up would indicate snow or wind.

"Looks as if he'd run into a nest of wasps," remarked the Skipper, glancing up from his scraping.

"Or bears," suggested Boggs, who had not yet entirely got over his affair at the cache.

All three stopped and stared. With strides fathom-long the usually imperturbable Doctor came galloping down the hill, waving both arms like a crazy man and shouting unintelligible words as he came.

CHAPTER XIV

MORE MYSTERY

THE three waiting explorers had but a single idea of what might be the matter with the excited Doctor: he had seen the *Erik*. Even the return of the *Pole Star* could not possibly work him up into the state of lunacy he exhibited on his charge down the hill. As a climax he stumbled and rolled like a wounded musk ox down the last snow-ribbon just above the camp.

"Hey!" bawled the Skipper, who had thus far concealed effectually his deep concern over the unexplained absence of his ship. "H'ist her up again, Barlow, and let's have the news."

"Wish—I—I could!" panted the Doctor, when he finally scrambled up, wiping wet snow from his eyes. "First of all there are a bunch of Eskimos on the other side of the hill."

"Hooray!" yelled Boggs, who had long before learned the worth of native aid.

The Skipper made no attempt to conceal his disappointment. "Piddle!" said he. "Only a bunch of grease spots!"

"That's not all by any means," continued the

MORE MYSTERY

Doctor. "They are shouting '*Oomiaksuaq!*' which, if I remember right, means 'the Big Ship.' And they are pointing toward the other side of the peninsula. As they came from that direction, they must have just seen the *Erik*."

The Skipper braced up a bit. "Any of our men with them?"

"Not that I could see. Only five sledges with native drivers to each. Must be a village near here as they did not have their womenfolk with them."

"There they are now!" cried Boggs.

Over the hill at a gallop came five teams of huskie dogs. Their tails were up, a sign of well-fed enthusiasm and anticipation.

Perched near the bow of each sledge knelt a skin-clad driver. Whips cracked like so many gunshots. Streams of Eskimo profanity mingled with yelps and shrieks of the animals. Powdery snow flew up in a misty cloud save where the metal-shod runners crossed bare rocks that struck showers of sparks into the air.

"We'd better move," thought Rudd, "before we get run over." But with a skill that awakened his admiration each driver swerved his team just before they crashed headlong into camp, capsized his sledge to hold them, and trotted up with shouts of greeting and laughter. No reunion of long-lost friends could have been so warm and noisy as

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

that which the good-natured natives made of the meeting.

The white men shook hands and grinned appreciation, speaking the while all English words of greeting with as much heartiness as if each syllable were understood. Captain Pike and Boggs could each use enough of the native tongue to act as interpreters. As soon as the tumult of joy had subsided a bit, both started in to discover what the news was about the *Erik*.

"*Oomiaksuaq! Oamiaksuaq!*" was all that could be got out of the visitors.

Boggs stalked up to the fattest hunter and shook his fist under his stubby nose. "Talk sense, you lump of blubber!" he bawled loud enough to be heard the other side of the peninsula, and repeated it in the best Eskimo he could master.

The native nearly doubled up with mirth, apparently at Boggs' pronunciation. Then he led Boggs to a patch of snow and began to sketch with his whipstock on the white surface.

"It's the shore line on the other side!" exclaimed Rudd.

He was right. The native marked Erik Harbor with a cluster of squares to indicate the cache. Some distance further down he drew the rough figure of a boat. "*Oomiak!*" he said gutturally.

MORE MYSTERY

"Must mean the *Pole Star*," put in the Doctor. "Ask him if she's wrecked, Pike; and if any one is aboard."

But the Skipper could gain only the information that the launch was floating in shallow water and that, so far as the Eskimos knew, no one was in her. They had not noticed if she were anchored. And, being somewhat nervous about the presence of devils, thought they had better look up the owners. They soon found the cache and were able to follow Rudd's and Boggs' week-old trail across the land.

The Doctor was not satisfied. "But I understood them to say they had seen the big ship," said he.

"They did, sir," said Boggs excitedly. "Look at that there map this guy's drawn."

With eagerness the castaways leaned over the crude chart. Just opposite the spot at which the *Pole Star's* resting place was marked showed the outline of a much larger craft. "*Oomiaksuaq!*" repeated the native, pointing to the sketch; and indicated that the *Erik* had been on her way south towards Fury and Hecla Straits just as Rudd had predicted.

Captain Pike shook his head. "I confess I have believed all along she would turn up again. I still can't give myself up to the fact that the old bucket's

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

gone." He pulled his whiskers. "But this certainly looks like it now!"

"It does indeed, Pike," said Dr. Barlow. And turning to Rudd, he held out his hand. "Forgive me, lad, if I was slow in believing you. Had I only listened to you in the beginning, this unfortunate end to our plans might never have come to pass."

"He's right on the job when there's anything doin', sir," said Boggs, proud of his friend. "I'm telling you he's got eyes in the back of his head!"

Rudd smiled his appreciation of this praise; but, being a little embarrassed, tried to change the subject by bringing up the possibility that Reggie had never reached the *Erik*. But the Doctor paid him a further compliment by asking him what he thought about it.

"I believe he did, sir." Rudd pointed to the Eskimo's sketch. "The *Erik* might have been out of sight among the icebergs the day Boggs and I were there. If Reggie managed to reach her, it would probably have been about where the sketch shows the *Pole Star* to be now. No doubt the launch was abandoned in order not to take that much extra weight aboard the ship."

"Don't you think we ought to investigate?"

"I think we ought to rescue our cooking gear and fuel we left aboard."

MORE MYSTERY

So it was agreed that instead of the party going to the cache direct it should visit the *Pole Star* first. If she were intact, a load of cases could be brought around on her. If she were wrecked, her cargo could at least be rescued.

The Skipper was called upon to arrange with the natives to help transport Rudd and the Doctor to the motor boat. After some discussion among themselves they pointed to their dogs and out to the broad sheet of old ice that had that morning drifted across the entrance of the cove.

"Say they have to get dog meat," interpreted the Skipper. "Probably will find seals on that ice out there, and with a good feed and rest will be able to start to-morrow for the *Pole Star*."

Rudd was more than pleased with this plan for it would give him a chance to see the hunters in action. The leader made signs that he would be glad to take Rudd along, and arranged a place for him among the skins at the back of his sledge. This proved an unjustified kindness, though. Between boulders on the land and rough pinnacles on the ice Rudd spent most of his time either dashing along beside the team or helping right the sledge which capsized every few moments. The others followed in column, each squad of yelping dogs apparently unified by a mad desire to be first in the race.

Some distance from the land the Eskimo signed to

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd that the dogs were to be hitched and the men go on to their hunting. Each team was made fast at some distance from the others. Obviously there would have been a battle royal had any pair of teams got mixed up, judging from the snarling and threatening growls that made an unceasing din.

On the ice the hunters separated. Rudd followed the leader who took him to a hole about a foot in diameter through which there were fresh signs of a seal's having come up to sun himself. Here the Eskimo laid a small square of bearskin on the ice and uncoiled his harpoon line he had brought from the sledge. The harpoon itself consisted simply of a wooden shaft tipped with walrus ivory to which was toggled a barb of the same material. The barb had been bored out to take the end of the seal hide line. Rudd saw, after a few moments of puzzling, that if the harpoon were driven at a seal, the barb would bury itself in the animal's flesh, at the same time becoming detached from the shaft. Thereafter the hunter could play his catch much the same as an angler his fish.

"Sh-h-h!" said the hunter, and motioned Rudd to stand back lest the seal see him. Then, for what seemed an interminable period, he stood absolutely immobile, his harpoon poised above his head. It did not seem possible that any human being could keep still for such a length of time. Rudd began

MORE MYSTERY

to have cramps and kinks in his legs and back despite the fact that he was free to wriggle a great deal more than the frozen native dared to.

Suddenly, just when Rudd had about given up hope, he heard a whistling sound that seemed to come from directly beneath his feet. The next instant a puffing accompanied by a small cloud of vapor issued from the seal's breathing hole.

The Eskimo did not strike at once. He seemed paralyzed. Not the quiver of a muscle showed that he was even alive. Then, like a lightning flash, he drove his harpoon straight down out of sight.

"*Ka! Ka!*" he shouted excitedly at Rudd. The latter dashed up thinking to seize the coil of line that was spinning out with dangerous speed. The Eskimo blocked him; and, snatching up a small spear, plunged its sharp point into the center of the coil. A moment later the end snapped up against the spear and Rudd saw that it had been spliced into a large eye, thus enabling the hunter to anchor his prey.

Now began a lively struggle. The jabbering Eskimo nearly wept in his frantic efforts to make the white man understand how to help. Finally he got through Rudd's head the fact that the spear's point was the crux of the situation. If the seal pulled that out, not only would he be lost but the precious line as well. Rudd promptly seized the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

handle below his companion's straining hands and jammed it into the ice for all he was worth.

At first it looked as if the seal were going to escape after all. The floe's crust was so rotten with the summer heat that it splintered and gave in every direction. The Eskimo panted and chattered and wagged his head. Rudd threw every ounce of strength he had into the task. Finally, with surprising abruptness, the strain slackened. The seal had come up to blow. From a near-by hole his puffing was audible, but neither of his captors dared leave their post lest he escape.

Four times was this performance repeated. Then the Eskimo with Rudd's assistance began to heave in the line. Finally the seal splashed up at their very feet and blew like a young whale. Rudd made as if to grab him much to the uproarious delight of the native. The latter merely stood his ground and every time the animal came up banged its head with his harpoon shaft until it was nearly drowned.

The end came by Rudd's taking the line while the Eskimo lay flat and reached into the hole. Grabbing the seal's hind flipper he got it between his teeth and rose slowly to his feet. With a chortle of delight he swung the squirming animal upon the ice. Dextrous work with his knife finished it off in a trice; and with Rudd tailing on he dragged it back to his ravenous wolves.

MORE MYSTERY

Seven seals in all were taken this way, ample to feed the dogs to repletion with enough over for a fat cache on the beach. The sun was well around by the time Rudd reached camp, tired and hungry. Boggs had saved a double portion of musk ox steak for him and the Skipper's pipe gave the hut a hospitable fragrance. Altogether he felt well contented with life.

"Almost sorry I wasn't born an Eskimo!" he exclaimed, and snuggled down into the luxurious bed of furs.

He dreamed he was harpooning the *Pole Star* with a ten-foot weapon and that Captain Pike was King of the Eskimos!

CHAPTER XV

THE WRECK

NEXT day the Eskimos refused to start on account of their dogs. This time the animals were so gorged with meat in place of their former starved condition, that work with them was impossible. Rudd and Dr. Barlow were grateful for the delay, as it gave them an opportunity to get their gear into shape for the long trip. Though spare moccasins had fortunately been brought in from the *Pole Star* before she left, rocky travel had already made great inroads upon their soles. A lucky find was made when Boggs discovered that one of the natives had several extra pairs of boots which proved to be large enough for both Rudd and the Doctor. With grass insoles and hareskin stockings these made both comfortable and rugged additions to the scanty wardrobe of each. Rudd also bought a caribouskin shirt from the man he had been hunting with. Two needles and a large nail he discovered in his sewing kit were the price paid.

"We'd better take tea for the crowd and depend on them for meat," suggested the Doctor. "That

THE WRECK

will not only conserve our tinned food, but will assure them we want to help out for the assistance they are giving us."

The Skipper dug a few little strings of beads from his belongings. "Better take them along, Barlow, in case you find bribery necessary. Never can tell when these fellows will lie down on the job and want to go bear hunting in place of the task you have set them."

As usual, the start was begun towards evening, when the low sun made the traveling surface hard. The dogs were eager for the trail and every tail was up with the satisfaction of the full stomach it represented.

The trip was without incident except that a short digression was made to stop at some bird snares one of the natives had rigged. Four eider ducks were the bag. Though this country was not the regular breeding place of these fowl a few had apparently found it to their liking.

"The North Greenland Islands are full of them," said the Doctor. "I understand the tribe we saw at Cape York lay away thousands of eggs each season."

"But doesn't that thin them out?" asked Rudd.

"Apparently not. Gun fire is the quickest way to empty a wild bird's habitat. They will stand for anything, even having their nests robbed at regular intervals, without bothering to find a new refuge.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

But once let shooting become an institution and the birds will lose little time in abandoning the spot for good."

Two sleeps were taken on the way over. The Eskimos appeared to be in no hurry and the white men could not impress on them the possibility that ice would damage the launch if she were exposed to the sea. In consequence neither Rudd nor Dr. Barlow were much surprised to find her missing when the spot was reached, at which the hunters had spied her but a few days before.

"Nothing to do but make a search for her," sighed the Doctor. "She certainly is giving us a wild goose chase these days. And the worst of it is I have a conviction that we ought to be utilizing every minute of our time preparing for the winter. Once the bitter cold comes there will be practically no means for increasing our meager store of supplies."

Rudd did not entirely agree. "Anyway, I think we ought to be sure about the others if we possibly can," he persisted. "Captain Pike still has hopes we may yet see the *Erik*. And there is always the chance that our people may be in real trouble, despite the suspicious events of the past weeks."

A shout came from one of the natives further down the shore. He was waving his arms and pointing to a spot at which the rocks rose perpen-

THE WRECK

dicular from the sea for a height of about thirty feet.

"I see her!" suddenly cried Rudd, and started at a run for the launch.

The *Pole Star* proved to be lying nearly on her beam ends with her stem wedged between two sunken boulders, half covered by the tide. Her little mast had been broken by impact with the ledge. And its wreckage with what remained of the torn and stranded shrouds littered her bow and one side. As she was not accessible, it was difficult to tell just how much damage had been done to her hull.

The leading Eskimo appeared with his coil of line and explained that he could be lowered to the boat's deck from the top of the rock wall. Once aboard he might be able to perceive some means for rescuing her from her perilous position.

This plan proved to be a failure, due to the fact that all rocks at the summit of the ledge were so loose that one might be dislodged and fall upon the boat. Further injury was certainly not to be risked with the miserable little craft already racked by the terrible strain of her position.

"Why not wait for the tide?" suggested Rudd.

Dr. Barlow examined the beach closely. "It's falling now," he concluded, "and from the looks of that bit of kelp I believe we may be able to wade to the boat within an hour or so."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Camp was made within sight of the wreck. In case the wind rose it would be necessary to make the best of a hasty examination. Also the hunters were excited over having spied half a dozen seals near land. Meat meant infinitely more to them than the white man's troubles, and a cache at this point would prove a link in their chain when winter came. Thus it is that all through the northland one may find the beaches fairly lined with small pyramids of stones which have once covered the native's hoard of meat. Sometimes for as much as two or three years such a supply may go untouched. But sooner or later the hunter and his lean-bellied starving team crawl up in the darkness. With an instinct born of age-long experience he finds again his unmarked cache, uncovers the time-ripened delicacies it contains, and feasts as no white man ever dreamed of feasting.

The sledges were propped up on end as a wind-break against the never absent chill of the northern draft. The white man's primus and a blubber lamp were soon alight. Tea was brewed and a pair of fat seal flippers boiled. All ate to repletion. Then the dogs were fed, a riotous proceeding in which every animal spent the entire time screaming for more, except when his dripping jaws were too full to yelp with. The Eskimos sang and told stories of other days. Doctor Barlow and Rudd forgot for

THE WRECK

the moment their anxieties and joined in the happy party.

"You see," said the former, "it's as I told poor Boggs; this country is lined with the gold of happiness and plenty if one only knows how to make the best of it."

Two hours later it was possible to wade within a few feet of the *Pole Star*. By dragging a sledge to her a bridge was made that permitted the entire party to walk aboard.

Dr. Barlow went first. The minute he stepped upon her forecastle he turned to Rudd and said: "Look! We must touch nothing." He signed the Eskimos to do the same.

To their amazement the launch had utterly changed. Except that her deck and fittings were as before, she was scarcely recognizable as the trim craft in which they had set out so hopefully from the *Erik* so short a while ago.

"Why, half a dozen men must have lived aboard her!" exclaimed Rudd. He noted with a wry face the collection of cigarette stubs, morsels of decayed food, scraps of clothing, papers, soap, and other filth that littered her previously tidy deck and cabin. "Looks as if she'd been used as a prison, doesn't she?"

"Does indeed," nodded the Doctor thoughtfully. "I wonder if she has?"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd shot him a look. "You mean you are following the mutiny idea?"

"I am—the same as you suggested. I can conceive of no better way to restrain a squad of unruly men than to dump them in a boat towed astern from a ship."

"You think she's been to the *Erik*?"

"Of course. Look at those lumps of salt beef. We had none aboard on our journey. Look at those fragments of coffee tins and ship's biscuit cases. All have come from the ship."

Careful search was made for some signs of Reggie's misadventure. But even if there had been any blood spots they had long since been obliterated by the smears of filth and grease which defaced practically every nook.

Rudd unscrewed the fuel tank's plug and poled in with a whip-stock. "Empty!" he exclaimed. "Looks more than ever as if she's been used as a prison ship!"

The Doctor had by this time stopped bothering with speculation and was busying himself with the more practical problem of how to make the boat useful again.

"Bilges are full," he said after lifting off the floor boards. "And there are evidences of leaking on the high side. Guess I'll take a look without."

The tide had fallen another six inches, revealing

THE WRECK

a crack in the hull just below the waterline and running for nearly two feet fore and aft.

"That's easy to fix," observed Rudd, who was something of a ship's carpenter after having had his own knockabout on Lake Michigan since he could hold a tiller and mainsheet. He scuttled down into the engine room and located a piece of lead sheeting from the tool box. In almost less time than it takes to tell he had tacked this temporary patch on the leak with a red-lead caulking and was willing to risk its virtue in any seaway.

By the time extreme low tide was reached half the keel was visible. Except for the damage Rudd had repaired there seemed to be no reason why the boat should not float. One boulder had to be rolled clear and the stern was swung around so as to get the full buoyant effect of high water. The anchor and tackle were fortunately intact. Both were removed to lighten the bow.

"Now there's nothing to do but wait!" exclaimed Dr. Barlow wearily. "We can lash that mast up somehow and use a blanket for canvas until we can secure enough sealskins for a sail."

"But how can we get out to her?" asked Rudd. He knew the boat drew too much water to be used without some sort of tender.

"Two ways," was the prompt reply. "One, we can ferry ourselves out on a captive ice cake; the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

other, we can try Peary's method of using inflated Eskimos' sealskin floats as a raft."

One of the natives was put on watch with instructions to call all hands when the water was high enough to float the launch. He also was cautioned to look out for any vagrant ice pans that might deal the little vessel a mortal blow at the very instant of her rescue.

Scarcely had the party dropped off into well-earned and dreamless sleep than a wild yell startled every man into consciousness. Rudd leaped to his feet expecting to see anything from the *Erik* to a pack of mad wolves. What did meet his eyes was in a way more startling than either:

Up the beach raced the watchman. As he ran he glanced in terror over his shoulder. His brown face had assumed an ashy pallor. Pebbles rattled away from his galloping feet. His arms waved. And with every breath he gave vent to a yell that awoke echoes from the hills.

At first there seemed nothing to account for his strange actions. The beach was empty. There was no sound save his own clamor. Then, slowly and to the amazement of the watchers, there staggered into view the figure of a man. He was dirty and unkempt. His weakness scarcely permitted him to walk. His clothing was torn and his hands exposed to the raw air. His face was nearly black, except

THE WRECK

near one eye where a swollen bruise showed yellow through the grime.

“It’s Reggie!” cried Rudd and darted forward. The next instant he realized his mistake. The pitiful wreck he faced was no other than Norman, the young Second Officer of the *Erik*!

CHAPTER XVI

NORMAN'S PRISON

NORMAN had scarcely been able to conceal his delight when he was left in command of the *Erik*. Though he was only twenty-four, he had followed the sea since boyhood. As seaman before the mast, as coxswain in the *Erik*, his great ambition had always been to stand up on a ship's bridge—*his own skipper*.

At last his desire had been gratified. As he stood near the *Erik's* wheel and waved farewell to the *Pole Star* he was in the boots of the Commanding Officer. Be it only for a few days at best, he was "Captain" Norman by virtue of the authority the Skipper had vested in him. He was king. His word was law.

But even law is vulnerable.

"Congratulations!" said a sarcastic voice at his elbow. He turned to find Mr. Menon leering at him. "*Captain* Norman," the First Officer uttered the title with a sneer of contempt, "may I have permission to walk about your deck for a little air?"

Norman's boyish face fell. It was not his fault that Mr. Menon had been for the while displaced.

NORMAN'S PRISON

Indeed, despite his ambition, he would rather have had authority pass by seniority to the next in order, namely, the villain before him, than incur this enmity which stole all the fun out of living. Norman had never had any enemies; and he was not sufficiently belligerent to enjoy hostility of any kind.

He escaped from the malicious Mr. Menon as soon as he could and made his way into the cabin. There he found the Chief Engineer. This officer was years older than Norman; but he was not a deck man, and therefore not in line for command.

"What's up, lad?" asked the grizzled old fellow when he sighted Norman's worried face. "Burden of command too heavy?"

Norman studied the Chief's square Scotch jaws, his strong, clean-shaven mouth, and his eyes blue as tempered steel. Something seemed to tell him he could lay his troubles before a man like this.

"It's Mr. Menon," he said finally.

The Chief smiled. "I thought as much." He came closer and laid his gnarled hand upon Norman's shoulder. "Laddie, I'm telling ye this for your own good: watch close. This Menon means not well. *Watch him close!*"

A step sounded on the ladder. The First Officer entered, ignored Norman, and addressed the Chief with a strength of argument that belied his pretended weakness.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Chief, weren't you up here on one of the Greely supporting ships?"

"Should say so!" was the emphatic answer. "Lucky to be alive now."

"And wasn't there one of them crushed in the ice?"

"Sure was; the *Proteus* went down forty minutes after being pinched off Cape Sabine. That was a lesson to me. Never count on getting out of this country until your ship's past Hudson Bay."

Mr. Menon perched himself with a satisfied air on the edge of the cabin table. "Now just suppose," he continued, "that ice came suddenly across the entrance to this harbor. Would we have a chance?"

"Not unless we ran for it."

"And could we count on getting back?"

"Not absolutely."

"Well, what's the answer?" He shot a glance at Norman, who had been looking from one to the other with growing anxiety at the ship's peril, something till this moment he had not fully realized.

The Chief rubbed his bristly chin. "The answer," he replied with conviction, "is to land supplies at this point for the party on the *Pole Star*. Then, if we get crowded out, they won't be hungry waiting for us. If we can't come back, they won't starve to death waiting for relief."

"Then we'd better land supplies at once, hadn't

NORMAN'S PRISON

we?" burst out Norman impetuously. "I'll give the orders now if you say so."

As both the older men agreed, he hurried up to start the breaking out of the provisions.

The minute he was out of sight Mr. Menon slapped the Chief heartily on the back and exclaimed: "Told you he would bite. Played right along with us and gave the orders himself! Neat—what?"

"You're a clever man," said the Chief slowly. "Too clever, Menon. You scare me a bit."

Norman returned to find the pair bending over a sheet of paper.

"A note to the Skipper," explained Mr. Menon. "In case we do have to get out there ought to be some sort of word explaining our absence."

The Chief pressed a blotter to the sheet and handed it to Norman. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

Norman read the statement carefully:

S. S. *Erik*,
Erik Harbor, B.P.,

DEAR PIKE:

July 18, 1921.

I write this because we might get beat out by ice. Don't worry. We will come back if we can. If, however, the *Erik* has unfortunately been crushed, you will not suffer the terrible fate of my friend Greely's party. These provisions will last a good while.

Your Ob't Serv't,
ANGUS WHELAN, *Chief Engineer.*

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Sounds all right," said Norman. "I understand that your idea in leaving this is that we might have to go suddenly and can't get ashore again."

The Chief nodded. He was addressing the envelope. "To be opened by no one but the Skipper," he wrote under Captain Pike's name. "Don't want them scientific highbrows to put no double meaning into this," he explained.

The cases had already been started ashore when Mr. Menon suggested to Norman that they take a walk up to the top of the hill for a look at the ice. "Can't be too careful," he declared. "And from up there we can get some idea of conditions to windward."

The quartermaster and a big Swede deckhand named Olsen accompanied the two officers. A short climb took them to the summit and the excellent view showed no ice near enough to be threatening.

Suddenly Mr. Menon turned to Norman with what seemed to be an attempt at a friendly smile on his ugly face. He laid his hand on Norman's arm and peered encouragingly into his face. This change of temper was so unexpected that Norman did not notice the two sailors step around behind him.

"My boy, aren't you planning to get married?"

"Why—yes—" stammered Norman.

"And you're just saving for a home in St. Johns before you finally hitch up?"

NORMAN'S PRISON

"You bet," was the eager reply. "And it's going to be the greatest little place you ever saw."

Mr. Menon leered his appreciation. "Wouldn't five thousand dollars help out?" he asked.

"Five thousand dollars!" gasped Norman. "Why, the whole thing will cost only three! What do you mean?"

The First Officer's eyes narrowed. "Just this. If you will simply sit tight and let me handle the present situation, I'll deposit that sum to your account the day we return."

"You don't mean to desert the *Pole Star*, do you?"

"It wouldn't be desertion. Ice is bound to keep drifting past this place. We should never be so safe that we wouldn't be justified in getting out any time. You are landing provisions. The *Pole Star* party could not possibly starve."

"But how would they return?"

"They would winter here; and we could have a relief ship sent up next summer. The Government would do it as long as it is backing this expedition."

Norman's fists tightened slowly. "You mean to say you expect me to be bribed into deserting my shipmates?"

"Exactly," Mr. Menon shrugged his shoulders. "They will be reasonably comfortable. You suffer no risk. A large sum of money will be paid you to keep your mouth shut. It is very simple and easy."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"You scoundrel!" Norman stepped forward and swung his clenched fist out. But before it landed he was seized in an iron grip and jerked heavily backward. He spun around in a fury and found himself facing the Quartermaster and Olsen, both nearly twice his size.

"It's simple enough," repeated Mr. Menon quietly. "There's no use getting excited about it. We've got you coming and going."

Norman at once saw the folly of trying to use force against such overwhelming odds. So he determined to temporize if possible in order to discover more about the plot. He still might be able to warn his friends in time to save them. Well he knew how terrible their suffering would be if forced to winter with only a small amount of provisions and no proper gear.

"What's the idea, anyway?" he asked.

"Ah," was the guarded reply, "questions from friends alone ought to be answered. Prove yourself our friend and we may let you in on the secret. But remember that after your display of temper just now proof will not be so easy."

"Suppose I don't agree—what then?"

"That's easy, too. You have two choices if you are determined to be our enemy. First, you may go back quietly with us and become a prisoner in your stateroom, letting it be known that you are ill and

NORMAN'S PRISON

have therefore relinquished command to me. What do you say?"

"But suppose I don't agree to that?"

"Then we have the second and even simpler plan of gently leading you to yonder glacier and tumbling you into one of its crevasses. The shallowest one is at least a hundred feet deep. No one would be the wiser. If you didn't break your neck you'd starve to death. We'd simply organize a search party and lead them to the wrong glacier. It's very simple, and no one could possibly suspect us."

"I'll take my room," said Norman without hesitation. That at least had the advantage of giving him time to think matters over. He was too much a man to accept the fiendish proposal even to deceive Mr. Menon. And he did not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the plot to murder him if such a course fitted best into the plan.

"And you give me your word to make no mention of this talk now or any other time?"

"I do." Norman felt justified in giving his word even with the knowledge that he might be forced some day to break it. Life or death of the absent party might depend upon his behavior from this minute on. He determined to watch his chances and make the best of them. Certainly the Chief must be on his side from the talk they had had this morning. And there were at least half a dozen men in the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

forecastle he could depend upon to remain faithful to Captain Pike.

Back at the ship he passed the word around that he had been seized with cramps during the climb and felt forced to seek his bunk. Mr. Menon locked the stateroom door after he had entered and kept the key. Only through the keyhole was there any view of the cabin into which the stateroom opened. Norman could not see the table, but a mirror in the built-in sideboard reflected the image of the First Officer seated writing.

"Well, how about it?" Norman heard the Chief say from the skylight.

"Turned me down," was the startling reply. "In his room now—not feeling well." A harsh laugh followed.

Norman's discouragement doubled. This interchange had proved that the Chief, notwithstanding his profession of enmity to Mr. Menon, was a partner in the scheme to desert the others.

"I'm just writing Caverly," continued Mr. Menon. "Ice looks well to the south. I'll tell him to meet us in Fury Straits."

"How about the others catching on?"

"Oh, I've fixed that. All I have to do is to use the word 'Fury' in the message and the boy will understand. We made it up before he left."

"I don't see what you want him in for anyway,"

NORMAN'S PRISON

came growling from the skylight. "He's bound to make trouble."

"It's worth it. I got him in on the way up. Explained our whole scheme and offered him the thousand we're panning out to the others. He said it wasn't enough. So I figured out another way. He gets ten thousand and I get ten."

"How's that?"

"Why, I simply bring him home to his gold-lined dad and claim twenty thousand for having saved his life. Reggie darling backs me up in the claim. I get the wad and split fifty-fifty with him. The Old Man would never notice a little cash like that."

A loud grating sound interrupted the conversation. Norman's heart sank into his boots. The anchor engine had begun to heave around.

CHAPTER XVII

MUTINY

THE moment the First Officer left the cabin Norman set about seeking some means of escape. If he could get away from the ship, he might at least join the other party in time to avert the loss of the *Pole Star*. He took it for granted that Caverly would attempt to rejoin the *Erik* in her. Further, he far preferred to cast his lot with Dr. Barlow, the Skipper, and Rudd than to take a chance with the pirates he had found himself among. As the anchor was being hove in, he had no longer reason to doubt that enough men had been enlisted to the evil cause to carry it out successfully. His own personal danger lay chiefly in the fact that, if he ever did reach New York, the criminals would always fear his confession of their perfidy.

First he tried the door. It was locked securely from the outside. He owned no spare key. The port was much too small to hope to escape that way. No tools were available that would enable him to cut his way through the side.

MUTINY

Suddenly he recalled that during the stifling June days when the *Erik* was lying at the East River dock he had arranged to ventilate his room by prying back a board from its forward wall. This wall did not belong, as might have appeared, to the next room, but formed part of a ventilating duct leading from the after hold. As the loosened board effected a good draft through the stateroom Norman had never taken the trouble to investigate it further.

Now he took a screwdriver from his locker and again removed the board. Reaching his arm through the aperture he discovered that the pipelike space beyond was at least a foot wide. Quickly he took off two more boards and peered in. By the light of a match he saw that the upper part of the ventilator ended in a small metal fitting in the deck, which could be unscrewed when the hold was to be aired. Escape this way was therefore out of the question. Downward lay the only course.

A piece of line served as a ladder. Securing it to an eyebolt near the head of his bunk he slid down it into the musty silence of the hold. A rat scrambled away in the darkness. Muffled sounds came from the deck overhead. A wheezing leaked through the forward bulkhead against which one of the feed pumps was secured.

"This doesn't get me far," Norman muttered to himself, and was about to return to his room when

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

he recalled once seeing a vessel being built along much the same lines as the *Erik*. She had had a sort of false bottom inside the hull for protection against moisture, as well as a security against ice pressure from without. "I wonder if there's one here?"

To his satisfaction he discovered the same design had been used in the *Erik*. By squeezing himself sidewise through the narrow space he was able to make his way not only past the engine and firerooms, but clear to the crew space forward under the fore-castle deck. Here but a thin bulkhead separated him from the little galley where the men's meals were prepared. Through a chink he could see dinner spread on the narrow hanging table beyond. The cook had apparently just burnt his hand, as he was swearing with great vigor and binding the injured member up with a piece of oily rag.

At this moment the anchor engine suddenly stopped. By the time it had been running Norman judged the chain had been hove short and to get under way would take but a few minutes. He heard clambering steps on the ladder and the men began to tumble down for dinner. To his surprise they did not at once seat themselves at the table but drew up standing in a kind of audience at the further end of the space.

"Are they all there?" called a voice from the hatch

MUTINY

which Norman recognized as that of the First Officer.

Olsen and the Quartermaster who had come down last counted noses and sung back that all were present. A moment later Mr. Menon himself appeared.

"Men," he began, "I want to speak a few words to you about our future." He looked sharply about as some one shuffled a foot.

"Pipe down!" growled Olsen.

"As Mr. Norman is ill in his bunk—" Norman grinned to himself—"I have taken command. From the hill this morning we saw tremendous fields of ice being swept down from the north." Norman smiled again. As far as he could recall, there was scarcely a pan in sight except near the beach. "The wind is freshening. If we have a blow and get caught in this hole, the ship will be lost. For that reason we have landed enough provisions to last the *Pole Star's* party in case we have difficulty working our way back."

Not a man stirred. There was a tension in the air far and beyond anything implied in the simple statement the First Officer had made. Norman was puzzled to see sly looks of pleasure steal across the faces of several of the seamen. Then he realized these must be those who were already agreed to mutiny.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"There's one other thing, men." The words came with deliberate slowness as if the speaker were allowing them to sink in while he argued. "It is just possible that Captain Pike and the members of the scientific expedition may decide to continue through the Northwest Passage by sledge. Eskimos live hereabouts and will work well for practically no pay. Captain Pike himself spoke to me about his doubts concerning ice conditions further west. He didn't think the *Erik* could possibly get through."

"A lie!" breathed Norman. He had heard the Skipper time and again assert his belief that the Passage was open every year.

"You men don't want to go in there and starve, do you?"

Half a dozen gruff "No's!" came from the crowd.

"Then, if we get word from the Skipper that he's going on with the highbrows, I shall expect every man of you to back me up in taking the ship to safety. Incidentally, there will be a reward for each man that sees this thing through if matters turn out right."

Olsen and the Quartermaster swung threatening eyes upon the crowd. Norman saw at least two men wink back in understanding.

"Now to be sure that we all are of a single mind," continued the First Officer, "I want to take a vote. All that are willing to handle the ship faithfully un-

MUTINY

der my direction, providing, of course, we get word from Captain Pike that he is going on west, raise their right hands."

There was a slight rustle as the hands went up. Norman counted them through the crack. He saw that several men hesitated. Then without warning a lanky Yank, whom he had never even noticed before except to know that the man was in the engine room, stepped forward and protested.

"This don't sound right to me, sir."

"What don't sound right?" snapped Mr. Menon.

"This idea of agreeing to get out of here and leave Captain Pike and the others. Besides, I happened to be up on the hill just before you were and I didn't see any ice!"

For a long moment Mr. Menon glared at the man. Norman thought at first he was going to strike him. Then he snarled:

"Ho—I always knew you whelps in the black gang were cowards!"

There was a movement towards the officer. But the next instant he had leaped upon the lowest rung of the ladder and shouted, "Get 'em, boys!"

Olsen and the Quartermaster sprang forward. When they seized the Yank, as if by signal, pandemonium broke loose. Blows were struck. One man rolled heavily under the port bunk rack. The table

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

with its heavy crockery and a platter of boiled beef was hurled upon the deck. Crash of planking told Norman the framing forward had caved in under impact of struggling bodies. Strangely enough no words were spoken. The battle progressed as if organized, each man having his definite antagonist.

"At 'em, boys!" cried Olsen, stepping back for a moment when he had tripped and thrown his man so stunningly upon the deck that the poor wretch sat stupidly until he was trampled upon by another pair of fighters.

Then, abruptly as it began, the brawl was over. Sixteen mutineers held pantingly six conscientious objectors, including the Yank who had refused to be bribed into the treacherous plan.

"Take them on deck," ordered the First Officer. "We can deal with them there." Norman saw him disappear through the hatch, followed by the six prisoners, each in the hands of two men.

"Guess I'd better get back," muttered Norman. "There's not much doubt now where I stand. And I guess they'll be getting out pretty soon."

His expectations proved correct. Scarcely had he regained his stateroom and had time to replace the boards over his tunnel than a key rattled in the lock. Mr. Menon entered and shut the door behind him.

"Well, Norman," he said cheerily, "the men have got together and taken a vote on my plan. Almost

MUTINY

unanimously they accepted it. I may as well tell you that one or two were stupid enough to follow your course of reasoning and refuse. However, I believe I shall have no trouble bringing them around to my way of thinking."

Norman couldn't resist leading the Officer on. "Did you have much difficulty in persuading the ones who sided with you?"

Mr. Menon walked into the trap without hesitation. "I should think not," was his hearty reply. "They simply gathered together forward and agreed to a resolution approving the whole scheme I had suggested. And they were nice enough to convey their support to me with the one or two backsliders bound and tied."

"What do you propose to do with them?"

Mr. Menon stroked his chin and with a knowing smile, said:

"Don't worry, my young friend. I'll persuade them to see the error of their ways, mark my word."

The ugly smugness and cruelty of his expression left no doubt in Norman's mind that the man was fiend enough to descend to any wickedness for the success of his plan.

"How about it, Menon?" came from the hatch.

"Just a minute, Chief; I'm seeing if our good shipmate Norman doesn't feel well enough to give us a lift on deck? How about it, Norman?"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

The prisoner's first impulse was to refuse. He abhorred the idea of being a party even remotely to the dastardly plot. And there was the further probability that his presence on deck might strengthen the First Officer's cause by making it seem he was on the villain's side. On the other hand, if he was going to be of any assistance to the missing party he must let no chance escape to secure information in regard to the movements of the ship and the intentions of her captors.

"You see we're a bit shorthanded," continued Mr. Menon, "with the Skipper absent and one or two of the deck hands behaving in such a way that I am forced to imprison them."

"Sure, I'll go," replied Norman in an attempt to indicate that he might be suspected of changing his mind about the business.

He was allowed to take the bridge after the anchor had been catted and fished. Twice Mr. Menon reminded him of his promise not to discuss present circumstances in any shape or form, and threatened instant punishment if he disobeyed.

From the harbor the *Erik* was headed directly across towards Baffin Land. It looked to Norman as if the plan was to conceal her position among the numerous huge bergs that floated about some miles off shore. Many of these were discolored in such

MUTINY

a way that gave them nearly the appearance of a ship. In consequence the *Erik* could be run into the field and hidden as effectively as a deer in brush, and still be close enough to the shore just left to observe any passing craft that might visit Erik Harbor. Towards evening the sky took on a fiery look and the wind freshened rapidly.

"Hope the *Pole Star* is out of the ice," thought Norman, as he watched the pans begin to come spinning out from the shallow inlets near shore. "She wouldn't last long in this wind."

Mr. Menon spent most of the time in the foremast barrel. He seemed concerned less with the ice than with the possibility of maneuvering the ship into a position from which she could not be too readily sighted from the land. While Norman knew he expected the *Pole Star* to be brought back by Reggie, there was every indication that he desired to sight the *Pole Star* before she could sight the *Erik*.

Hourly the wind increased until, by the time Norman was relieved, the ship had to be brought out into the open channel lest she foul one of the bergs which were now beginning to careen about. She was swung over into the trough of the choppy sea and allowed to drift slowly to leeward.

Norman ate in the mess room as usual, but no word was spoken except between the Chief and Mr.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Menon who discussed their past sealing experiences without once referring to the *Erik* or her cruise.

“Six hours ago I was Skipper!” thought Norman sadly, when Mr. Menon locked him in his room after the meal. He clenched his teeth. “And I’ll be Skipper yet!” he vowed.

CHAPTER XVIII

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

N EAR midnight Norman was roused by a crash that shook the *Erik* from stem to stern. He leaped from his bunk and stuck his head through the port. More swiftly he drew it in again. A chunk of ice the size of a beef barrel hurtled by and landed with a great splash in the sea alongside.

“Must have struck something!” he exclaimed, and threw on his boots and shirt in case he should be needed. Thuds of running feet sounded overhead and there were hoarse orders from the bridge.

He was not surprised when Olsen appeared at the door with word that Mr. Menon wished to see him on deck.

A wild sight met him. As far as the eye could reach spread the ice field. A roaring wind swept down from the northwest; but its whistling was drowned in the crashing and grinding of the floes. Fortunately there were no bergs in the immediate vicinity. Only great, thick pans, anywhere from a few fathoms to hundreds of yards in diameter,

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

dashed themselves at one another as if they were a multitude of huge white bulls locking horns in mortal combat. Here and there where the black water was visible between deadly ice edges the gale picked up sheets of spray and carried them in lacy streams across the awful tumult.

"Go forward!" Mr. Menon bawled to make himself heard above the storm, "and see what you can do in the way of clearing our bowsprit."

Norman noticed then for the first time that the collision had carried away the *Erik's* jib boom and bowsprit back to the ship's stem. He dashed forward to the forecastle, calling to the deck hands as he ran: "Axes, men!" He seized one seaman who stood and stared without obeying. "Come on, you blockhead!"

The fellow grinned sheepishly. "I can't, sir," he said. "Look."

Norman then saw he was lashed to the pinrail. And following the prisoner's pointing finger, he saw five others in the port passage likewise secured. At once he realized they were the ones who had refused to mutiny and were awaiting action of the leader.

For an hour the perilous work went on. It was necessary to free the *Erik* of anything that might impede her steerageway. In this conflict of elemental forces her only chance lay in getting far enough

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

away from the battling floes not to be caught in their grip.

"Stand clear forward!" came from the bridge. The ship quivered. Full speed ahead had been rung up to the engines. The men braced themselves for ramming. Even then the blow nearly threw them off their feet.

Norman sprang to the rail and with one dexterous blow of his ax severed the last remaining jib stay that threatened to foul the vessel's bow.

"All clear, sir!" he sung out. "And opening ahead!"

He was right. As if by an act of Providence a black and jagged lead ran crookedly through the field ahead, beginning at the vessel's bow. A dash for life was the only thing that could save the *Erik*.

"Give her all you can!" bawled the First Officer to the engine room. His eyes lighted suddenly upon two firemen that were among those lashed to the rail. "Free those men, Norman, and send them below." In the desperate peril of the ship there was little risk in giving even such revolutionary spirits as these their chance to help.

Black smoke poured from the funnel. As if so many slathering wolves were at her heel the little ship gathered speed. And there were wolves—white ones—the rending, tearing floes that tumbled and

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

crashed into the lead, closing it up a few seconds after she had passed through.

But luck was on her side. The *Erik* came out unscathed and less than an hour later rolled easily in the open water on the windward side of the field. All through the night and the next day the wind roared and howled, interspersed by flurries of snow. But the real danger had disappeared with the ice. And finally, when the gale blew itself out, there was little besides the missing bow spars to indicate that the weather had been unusual at all.

Norman was particularly interested in this because he heard from his room a conversation in undertones between the Chief and Mr. Menon that indicated some damage had been done to the hull.

"Taking water along her port side," were the exact words he caught.

"Can we show it to them now?" was Mr. Menon's reply.

"Any time you want." And they both disappeared on deck.

"That's funny," thought Norman. "Except for that blow we got on the bow, I am positive there was no pressure heavy enough to open any of our seams." Norman had done spring sealing in the St. Lawrence all his life and knew pretty well what a ship like the *Erik* ought to stand.

"Guess I'll have a look myself."

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

He opened the hidden escape in his room and crept down through the ventilator. From the hold he inspected every inch of both sides. There was not only no water coming in through any seam, but there was no bulging to indicate that any damage whatever had been done. "Guess it's part of their little game," was his conclusion. "Can't tell what lie they will think up next."

Scarcely had he returned to his room when Mr. Menon entered with the exciting news that water was making fast in the hold and that the pumps were just able to keep up with it. "Come up and have a look," he suggested.

Norman followed with deep suspicion.

At the engine room hatch were gathered all the crew except the prisoners who had been tied up again. The Chief stood on the hatch-coaming with an anxious look. Olsen and the Quartermaster were just behind him, apparently acting as a body guard in case anything unexpected should arise.

"See for yourselves!" announced the Chief. Several men leaned curiously over the hatch and muttered imprecations at the ice. "My pumps will just handle it now."

Norman pushed his way through the crowd and looked below. The floor plates of the engine room had been removed disclosing the bottom of the ship. Black and oily water slushed about. A rivulet ran

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

visibly down from the turn of the bilge to port, obviously due to a serious leak in the ship's side.

"See that, Norman?" asked the Chief.

Norman could not answer in his bewilderment. "How can it be possible," he puzzled, "for there to be such a leak when I have just examined the side and found it intact?"

"Hear those pumps?" went on the Chief.

Norman listened for a moment to the chugging machinery. "I certainly do, sir," he replied enthusiastically.

Then a grin suddenly pulled his mouth's corners nearly to his ears. By the feed pump in the corner he saw a small brass pipe had been rigged in such a way as to lead behind the bulkhead which lined the outboard wall of the room. Norman's familiarity with the machinery immediately cleared the mystery. The chugging pump was simply taking water from the bilge and squirting it back into the bilge again through this brass pipe higher up, making the stream that seemed to come through the ship's supposedly injured side.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Norman when he reached his room again. "I've heard of fake oil wells and fake gold mines; but this is the first time I ever heard of a fake leak! What in sin and thunderation can be the idea?" For a solid hour he sat and puzzled over the riddle.

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

That Mr. Menon's scheme was to seize the ship and abandon the *Pole Star* party was clear enough. He had said as much to Norman. But what the profit in such a course could be was beyond imagination. It was conceivable that he might have some wild thought of gathering gold, or furs, or even attacking some merchant vessel in the manner of an old-fashioned pirate. But in these days of strict laws on the high seas it would be well-nigh impossible to carry out successfully any such desperate undertaking. Norman knew this, and up to the present had believed Mr. Menon insane even to contemplate such a course as he was following. But the new freak Norman had just seen, an artificial leak made just to deceive a few stupid deck hands, could be listed as nothing short of the act of a madman.

"The trouble is," groaned Norman, "that it is so unlikely Olsen and the Quartermaster and the Chief should all be lunatics in the same way." He scratched his tousled head. "I wonder," he asked himself, "if it is myself that is the imbecile and imagining all these nightmares? If so, I wish I'd wake up!"

A distant commotion on deck roused him from his melancholy reflections. As the door was locked and the rumpus seemed to come from forward, he used his usual means of escape to make his way to the forecastle bulkhead *via* the hold. Shouts and yells

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

were here heard much more distinctly; but, as the space was empty, he saw no use in hazarding discovery of his secret by remaining. He returned and clambered back to his stateroom.

To his horror the door was wide open. In his absence some one had come and gone. Who could it have been?

He did not have to wait long to find out that word had been passed of his secret. Before he had time to collect his wits and think up some sort of explanation or excuse, Mr. Menon came tumbling down the cabin ladder and dashed around the table.

"So this is the way you treat my kindness in letting you have the freedom of the ship, is it?"

Norman thought it better to let the man cool his wrath in speech. So he kept silent.

"Suppose you've been spying on us all around the decks, eh?" The First Officer's guilty conscience was apparent. "Now get busy and show us where this rat hole of yours runs to."

Norman struck a match and held it down the ventilator. "Only down the hold, sir." He pointed to the cases dimly revealed by the flickering light. "I certainly can't make trouble for you down there, I had to do something to amuse myself while I was tied up in this room. That the pipe was there I discovered last month. Thought I'd have the fun of exploring it."

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

But Mr. Menon was not convinced. Sending for the Quartermaster who was of much the same slender build as Norman, he directed him to examine not only the shaft but all spaces to which it gave access in the hull of the ship.

"Can't get out that way," the man testified when he returned from his exploration. "It's possible, however, to go forward of the engine room and see into the forecas'le."

"How about the side of the ship?" snapped Mr. Menon.

"See it all—especially along by the engine room."

Mr. Menon turned in fury to Norman. "So you've been sneaking around, have you, and prying into all my affairs?"

Before Norman had time to answer the door was slammed in his face and the key turned. Ten minutes later Mr. Menon reopened it.

The outer cabin was empty.

"Come out here, you young fool!"

Norman came, ready for anything.

"Now follow me." Mr. Menon led him through the Captain's cabin to a small door opening in the bulkhead near the head of the bunk. He signed Norman to enter. "You're too dangerous to be trusted!" was his parting shot as he crashed the door shut and bolted it from the outside.

In the darkness Norman felt his way around the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

little cell. There was no light save one gray beam that struggled through a chink in the door. Heavy timbers of the ship ran across the floor in two places, providing a place to sit. Except for this the room was devoid of any article.

"Solitary confinement!" chuckled Norman, refusing to be downcast.

At regular intervals the Quartermaster brought him food and water. The man did not seem particularly unfriendly, but always lingered a few minutes to chat with the prisoner and apprise him of general conditions on deck. He admitted the ship was under way again and headed south; but would give no information about the plans. Indeed, Norman finally came to the conclusion that only Mr. Menon, the Chief, and possibly Caverly, had any real conception what the mystery was. The sailors were content to pick that side of the quarrel which promised them the greatest profit. So long as they received the money Mr. Menon had offered they were not greatly concerned with the means by which he was able to raise funds to pay them.

On the second day of this miserable existence Norman distinctly heard the puffing of a motor boat coming faintly through the ship's side. He put his ear to the oaken wall and was surprised at the clearness with which sounds came through. He heard Mr. Menon's hail: "*Pole Star*, ahoy!" and

CRUSHED IN THE ICE

reply came back in a voice he recognized as Reggie's: "Coming alongside, sir. I'm alone."

Norman's curiosity was somewhat gratified when the Quartermaster brought him in his lunch. "Didn't the launch return?" he asked with what indifference he could command.

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the sailor. "Mr. Caverly came back in her. Brought good news, too."

"What?" asked Norman eagerly.

"Well, I don't know as how I ought to tell you, being as Mr. Menon says I oughtn't to talk too much when I'm down here." Then he changed the subject. "Say, the boy had a nasty cut on his shoulder. Said he'd fallen off an iceberg trying to get some fresh water. Looks to me like he'd been burned by a bullet though. I've seen the same in the war when a fellow'd get just missed."

"That's too bad," Norman sympathized. "But go on and tell me the news. Goodness knows, it's rotten enough down in this hole with nothing to think about."

"I may as well," the other mused. "Mr. Menon has called all the gang up and told them about it."

Norman bit his lip in suspense. He was afraid to seem too anxious lest the man should become suspicious and tell nothing. Finally the story came out:

"Why, it's news from the Skipper," the Quartermaster explained. "Mr. Caverly says he has decided

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

to go on with the *Pole Star's* party and travel with the Eskimos. They had a fine camp on the other side of the peninsula, and by this time are probably a long way west. Captain Pike sent word for Mr. Menon to take the ship on south."

"It's a lie!" blurted Norman. "*A low-down lie!*"

CHAPTER XIX

PIRACY

WHEN Rudd dashed forward to meet the disheveled Norman on the beach the thought struck him that of all surprises they had anticipated this was by far the greatest. Both he and Dr. Barlow had realized that they might discover Reggie had perished; or the *Pole Star* had been wrecked; or the *Erik* crushed in the ice and lost. But no flight of imagination could have revealed to them the sight of Norman reeling like a drunken man, covered with dirt, and bearing the aspect and general appearance of a castaway who has just suffered unspeakable tortures in his efforts to reach safety.

"You poor fellow!" exclaimed Rudd, as he held out his arms lest the vagrant collapse. He was just in time to prevent Norman from toppling upon the gravel. Rudd realized the happy luck that had brought them to the spot at this opportune time. Another hour and Norman might have succumbed to his weakness.

"Get him into your sleeping bag," commanded the Doctor. "And I'll prepare some broth." He took

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Norman's temperature to make sure there was nothing radically wrong besides his utter exhaustion, which made it impossible for him to talk. "Sleep and dry clothes are what he principally needs," was the Doctor's professional advice.

"Looks as if they'd been having some sort of trouble, even more than we imagined," suggested Rudd.

The Doctor adjusted the primus and threw a pinch of tea into the pot before replying. "Does indeed, Rudd. Incidentally this youngster Norman is to my mind one of the most trustworthy men we had aboard. That he should turn up in this condition is really positive proof that the wrong crowd is in command of the *Erik*."

"Did you notice his wrists?"

"I did. Badly bruised and swollen. They will need attention when he wakes up. Had you any particular idea about them?"

"Only that they looked as if the wounds might have been caused by lashing a line around them too tightly."

"You mean he might have been bound?"

"And gagged too," added Rudd. "His cheeks had gag-marks running nearly to his ears."

Norman stirred in his bag. "I won't do it!" he exclaimed. "I won't. Go ahead—if—you—dare!"

Dr. Barlow smiled. "Man's talk, Rudd, even in

PIRACY

his dreams! He's living again the last few days, the poor devil."

Not until Rudd saw Norman on his feet the next day could he believe such quick recovery was possible after a man had been in the terrible condition Norman had seemed to be in the night before.

"Youth comes back quickly," observed the Doctor. "Now tell us something about it, Norman."

"There's not much to tell, sir," was the modest reply. "Mr. Menon seized the *Erik* and tried to get me to join him in some scheme which I never entirely understood. Reggie Caverly came back in the *Pole Star*. I was able to get away in her, got wrecked, and here I am."

The story sounded simple enough but it did not explain Norman's condition when he first appeared. And both Rudd and Dr. Barlow were so incredulous of the First Officer's ability to carry out his nefarious plan that they insisted on details.

"Were the men willing to join Mr. Menon?" asked Rudd. "I knew they liked him pretty well; but I didn't think the whole company would desert a fine Skipper like Captain Pike."

"No, they weren't. Five of them rebelled at the idea of mutiny. First they were tied up on deck. When Reggie returned they were put in the *Pole Star* astern without food or water or blankets. Once a day a small ration of raw salt beef and hard bread

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

was hove over to them. While the ship towed them along, they were always cold and miserable and hungry. After a day of this treatment all gave in but one. He held out another twenty-four hours, and then agreed to do as the others had done—sign an agreement that every act of Mr. Menon's was perfectly all right."

"But how about the Chief?" Rudd had become very fond of the old fellow and couldn't believe him capable of joining Mr. Menon's lawlessness.

"He went, too."

Dr. Barlow seemed not to be surprised. "Don't think too hard of him, boys. I happen to know he has an invalid wife who has been bedridden for years. Now she is gradually losing her eyesight. Only an operation will save her. His desire for money to give her back what little comfort she can enjoy is sufficient to lead him into any scrape."

"The worst part," Norman went on, "was when they discovered I could get out of my room. Mr. Menon locked me into a lazaretto with no porthole. I stayed there three days and would have been there yet if Reggie hadn't come into the cabin for some charts just as I was having my food brought around. The Quartermaster had forgotten to put some water on the tray and told Reggie to keep an eye on me while he went back to the galley.

"I asked Reggie where we were going.

PIRACY

“ ‘Home,’ he said, with a grin that made me sore.

“He was evidently pleased to see me in such a mess. I guess I was not myself, anyway, with having been cooped up so long. So I beat it right out into the cabin and told him what I thought of him and his whole parcel of murderous friends.

“ ‘Well, what are you going to do about it?’ said he.

“ ‘This!’ I came right back at him, and gave him a wallop across the jaw that must have made him see stars. He opened his mouth to yell for help. But before he could let out a squeak I grabbed the pillow off the bunk and wrapped it around his head.”

“Pity you didn’t give him a good thrashing then and there!” exclaimed Rudd, ready to burst with all the feeling that had been bottled up inside him since the *Pole Star’s* theft.

“Don’t know but I might have,” Norman went on, “but just then the Quartermaster came back. He threw the water, mug and all, at the back of my neck, and jumped on me with both fists going at once. I was so mad I could have licked them both; but lack of exercise had taken some of my strength so they had me down in a couple of minutes and tied up my feet and hands with a lanyard out of the Skipper’s bag.”

The speaker paused and looked ruefully at his wrists which the Doctor had bandaged up.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"You're lucky they didn't lynch you!" put in Rudd; "I doubt if they would stop at anything now."

"No," said Dr. Barlow, "they won't spill blood if they can possibly avoid it. Their whole game depends on deceiving the men into thinking there is full justice on their side. And, whatever explanation is given when the *Erik* gets back to the States, you may be sure it will seem to our friends that everything is perfectly all right."

"You mean they won't send a relief up for us?"

"Not at all. I am beginning to give Menon credit for being clever enough to manufacture a story that will hold water. And, while I can't yet see where his profit can come in from stealing the ship, I do believe he is counting on reaching home this season and cleaning up before we get back. That is what irritates me so. If we could only have the luck to head him off and be there first, we would see him in jail before any of his crowd could escape."

"I quite agree with you, sir," said Norman. "Even the Quartermaster and Olsen who were closest to him were not aware that there was anything radically wrong. I think they had some vague idea that your plan to go through the Northwest Passage was a foolhardy one, and that Captain Pike was deceived into joining you. The money Mr. Menon was promising them, Olsen told me, was to come

PIRACY

from the Company because Mr. Menon was saving the ship. The rest of the crew were probably deluded into the same idea."

"Do go on," interrupted Rudd, "and tell us what happened after they tied you up in the cabin. I can't see how in the thunderation you ever escaped!"

Norman laughed. "I didn't exactly escape. They gave me the chance to get away."

"You don't mean to say they actually let you go?"

"Well, it amounted to the same thing. Mr. Menon was so furious that he ordered me dumped into the *Pole Star*. Olsen doubled my lashings before I went over the side. Of course it was done while the ship's company were asleep, with only the Quartermaster and Olsen on watch. I was gagged also in order to prevent my crying out and letting any one know I was down in the launch."

"But how about food?"

"They didn't give me any. Guess they figured that if I got good and cold and hungry I might come around to their way of thinking. Regular piracy—torture a man into doing what you want him to!"

"That's the North for you," put in the Doctor. "'Never a law of God nor man goes north of fifty-three,' or something like that, is the tradition. And this pretty much proves it."

Norman shrugged his shoulders. "I'll have the law on them yet!" he blurted. "The scoundrels!"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Guess that's the way we all feel," assented Rudd, clenching his fists. "But what did you do then?"

"First of all I realized how quickly my strength would go. I had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and only a bit of seal meat then. The line around my wrists was so tight that the flesh began to swell, and the pain was so great inside an hour that I felt dizzy from it and the choking gag. I lay on deck in the *Pole Star's* cabin. I tried to roll over to see if I could hump myself to the hatch and possibly get out where one of the seamen might see me and lend a hand by throwing over a knife or something. On the fourth attempt the boat suddenly gave a lurch. It was just enough to let me flop over on my face. From that position I wriggled to my knees and was able to move as far as the latch on the mess gear locker at the forward end. You may remember this latch had a sharp catch. By working the line on my wrists back and forth on this catch I managed to cut it. Then I untied the gag and loosed the lashings on my ankles."

"Gosh! You must have been all in after that!" exclaimed Rudd admiringly. "No wonder you looked fagged out when we saw you."

Norman smiled. "That was the smallest part of the job. I had scarcely got loose when I heard voices on the deck above. Apparently some one was coming down to see how I was getting along. For

PIRACY

a minute I didn't know whether to wait and try to overcome them, or to return to my lashings and pretend I was still tied up. I decided the latter was the safest plan and quickly put the lines back on and the gag in my mouth.

"Scarcely had I plumped down on the deck again when Mr. Menon came in followed by Reggie and the Quartermaster. 'Norman,' he said, 'I have brought Mr. Caverly down to tell you with his own lips that the Skipper has decided to go west with Dr. Barlow, and has sent word that he wished me to go with the *Erik*.' He then took the gag out of my mouth.

"'Anything to say?' he asked.

"'Only what I said before,' I told him. 'I think Caverly is a liar; and I hate to add what I think of you.' "

"'Good work!' burst in Rudd. "I guess that let him know how he stood!"

"Sure did. He was so mad he couldn't speak for a few minutes. Reggie was for taking me up on deck and giving me some punishment—old-time cat-o'-nine-tails I guess he had in mind. But Mr. Menon got a hold on himself and finally put the gag back in twice as tight as before. 'He needs a little more treatment,' he told Reggie, and they left. I waited until they had got up on deck and then jerked out of the lashing again. I found there were about thirty

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

gallons of gas in the tanks. This was enough to take me back to you once I got clear. Soon as everything was quiet I cut the painter. As the *Erik* was making about six knots I dropped astern pretty rapidly. But there was no wind so I was afraid to start the engine too soon lest they hear me. Then it began to snow and blotted out everything. I started up the engine right away and headed for the cache. But as the compass was considerably on the blink, I took up so far north of Erik Harbor that I had some trouble knowing just where I was. I backed off and coasted down till I thought I had hit the place, and headed in again. Then it began to blow and drift until I couldn't see my hand before my face. First thing I knew I jammed in here against the rocks. As the fuel ran out just about then, there was nothing to do but wade ashore. I was afraid to lie down and sleep. Mr. Menon had stripped the launch of all blankets. And I'd have frozen to death if I had tried to stay ashore; also it wasn't safe to stick aboard with the *Pole Star* high and dry on the beach. The only thing to do was to try to return to the cache in hope I might find some of you there. I had just come back from the hill after looking for a trail when you showed up."

At the end of this long recital Dr. Barlow leaned forward and held out his hand. "Norman," he said, "I want to shake hands with a *man*. You had

PIRACY

the grit to stick it out for your convictions, not only against the temptation of bribery, but in face of what must have looked pretty much like certain death sooner or later."

"Thank you, sir," Norman stammered.

Rudd put out his hand. "Them's my sentiments, too, old man!" he exclaimed, "and we're going to get that gang of pirates too; you watch!"

CHAPTER XX

RED MEAT

HIGH tide took the *Pole Star* clear of the rocks and thereafter she swung easily to her anchor. The party's troubles, however, were only just begun. Some means must be had of reaching her from the beach. Her mast and sail had to be repaired and rigged. And there was the ever harrying anxiety about ice.

"We mustn't lose a moment getting out of here," urged the Doctor. "One pan would undo all that we have done."

Two sealskin floats were secured from the Eskimos and lashed together. These floats are made by skinning a seal literally *through its nose*. The hunter begins at the animal's lips and works his hand gradually back along the neck until he can peel the hide off as if it were an umbrella cover. It is then turned inside out and cured in the sun. The women chew its fat out and roll it well to make it pliable. An ivory mouthpiece is inserted at the muzzle end and the float can then be inflated like a football.

Dr. Barlow asked one of the men to let him have

RED MEAT

several crosspieces off his sledge. "We can make it up to you from the launch," he said.

But the native refused with the explanation that he had to collect meat for the winter and could not risk wrecking his only vehicle for transporting it.

Then Norman had the bright idea of suggesting that the hunter be allowed to accompany them on the trip to the cache which was not over ten miles up the coast. "We shall probably see walrus on the way. Since we have to sail it will be easy to approach the animals. As reward for this hunter's help we can present him with the meat of one."

This plan was finally got through the Eskimo's thick skull and he promptly ripped two slats from his sledge. These were lashed across the floats. A piece of sealskin with several bits of driftwood were then fashioned into the blade of an oar with a harpoon as a handle.

"Remarkable what you can do," the Doctor exclaimed, "when put to it!"

"I should say so!" agreed Rudd. "Why, I can remember thinking how ingenious I was to get along in the Maine woods camping with a tent and a whole collection of high-class equipment. Think of it! The temperature was nice and warm. There were a million feet of timber growing within a hundred yards of my camp. Plenty of fresh water splashing by in a trout brook full of fish. When it

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

rained I thought what hardships I was enduring!"

Norman laughed in appreciation of the comparison. "And now you haven't anything but a primus and a hundredweight of seal meat, eh?"

"Pretty nearly that. Then there's this snowstorm business that comes around every other day; no wood to burn; no game to get—that is, for a tender-foot like me."

"And yet," put in the Doctor, "we're as happy and warm and dry as if we were home, and having twice the fun, what?"

One of the hunters stepped up and began to jabber. He pointed excitedly at the *Pole Star* and then to a large floe several hundred yards out. "He says," Dr. Barlow interpreted, "that he has been watching that piece of ice for the last few minutes. The tide is going to bring it squarely on to the *Pole Star* if we don't get her out."

Camp was hurriedly broken without waiting to repair the mast. The dogs belonging to the Eskimo who was to accompany the boat party were divided among his friends with the understanding they would meet him at the cache. Blankets and stove were ferried aboard with the raft, Norman manning the extemporized scull. Finally the anchor was hove up and the launch drifted away helplessly just in time to escape for the fourth time being annihilated by the evil spirits of the cruel Northland.

RED MEAT

The huge floe came in as the Eskimo had predicted; but, instead of crashing past the land, it grounded gently with one corner a hundred yards wide upon the beach and hung there until the next capricious wind or tide should pull it off. This proved a godsend for these in the boat. The *Pole Star's* painter was simply passed to a mooring on the ice and secured there until the spliced mast again stood bravely in its step and the much patched sail spread welcomingly to the breeze.

"Well, here we are again, boys!" said the Doctor cheerily. "Still on our way; busy, and a reason for it."

Neither Rudd nor Norman replied with much interest to this philosophical sally. They were too busily engaged in watching the hunter prepare for the walrus that might be seen on the trip.

"Same gear he used on seal," explained Rudd. "Except that the detachable barb on the end of his harpoon is heavier."

"Has to be," put in the Doctor. "The walrus' hide is one of the thickest and toughest skins in the animal kingdom. Even the elephant or rhinoceros are not more efficiently covered than this hippopotamus of the north."

"Hippopotamus is right," commented Norman. "The first time I came up here we killed one weighing over three thousand pounds."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

The Eskimo interrupted by asking Rudd to help him coil his line down. On top of the coil he laid the float. Beside this he propped a small drag about two feet square. It consisted simply of a wooden frame across which was spread a backing of skin. A bridle led from the four corners of the drag to the line carrying the float.

"What's the idea?" asked Rudd.

The Eskimo laughed, and with a series of graphic gestures showed how he harpooned the walrus. The coil of line ran out with the float at its end to show which way the walrus was going. The drag simply tailed along behind to impede the animal's progress. Finally he would become tired and go slow enough to be overtaken and stabbed with the small iron-tipped harpoon or lance.

The hunter was poking himself in his ribs to illustrate how this lance penetrates the victim's lungs and finally kills him. Suddenly he stopped and in a hoarse whisper said something in his own tongue. Rudd followed his pointing finger and saw what appeared to be a mound of dark brown earth piled on a large floe about a quarter of a mile north of them.

"Walrus, as I live!" exclaimed Norman.

The Doctor stood up and balanced the tiller between his ankles. "Ten of them at least," he estimated. "Rudd, you and Norman join the Eskimo

RED MEAT

in the bow and I will handle the boat. Have your rifles ready with magazines filled. Don't shoot unless you can hit within two inches of the creature's eye. His brain is really the only spot vulnerable to a rifle bullet. And that is so small that there is no use shooting at any great distance."

"Shall I use your rifle, sir?"

"No, its bullets wouldn't think of penetrating the skull. I've seen thirty rounds from a carbine flatten up against one of their skulls without ever stopping the animal."

As the *Pole Star* drifted slowly down upon the sleeping herd the three men in the bow and the Doctor at the helm stood as if blocks of stone. Every few minutes two or three of the great animals would raise their heads and look about. This is the usual custom of sea animals that sleep out of water. Easily the floe might be swept upon the beach, be boarded by wolves or bears and the walrus calves murdered before their parents could get them over the side.

While the boat was still out of safe rifle shot a cow cruised up with her young one. The little fellow—he couldn't have weighed over five hundred pounds—squealed and puffed in his efforts to haul himself up with his weak little flippers. The mother grunted and nudged him with her great tusked snout until he finally wriggled up. Then with a splash

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

that sent ripples clear to the motor boat, she boosted her own ponderous weight upon the floe and wallowed over to the massive collection of her friends and relatives.

Closer and closer crept the boat. To the walrus she must have appeared only as a mass of dirty ice, such as they were accustomed frequently to see. Little did they suspect the fusillade of lead that was stored in the black barrels which Rudd and Norman rested upon the forward rail.

Once Rudd made as if to shoot, but the Eskimo nudged him with his boot and shook his head. It seemed impossible that they could get any nearer and not have the game realize their peril. Rudd had not yet fully appreciated how seldom human kind were ever present in these distant waters. Later he discovered that with the exception of the wily foxes he could fool nearly any northern animal into believing he meant them no harm if he only knew how to go about it.

When the boat's bow was not ten feet from the edge of the floe the largest of the walruses, a great bull from his thick tusks and colossal size, suddenly raised his head with a loud snort of warning. Instantly every animal in the herd was awake. The cow was the first to move. With a deep bellow of fear she slid towards her child and pushed it into

RED MEAT

the water, diving after it just before Dr. Barlow sprang to his feet and yelled, "Shoot!"

For sixty seconds Rudd lived the most exciting moments of his life. Fast as he and Norman could pump cartridges into their repeating rifles, they fired into the furious mob of animals. It was not wild firing either. Both realized the preciousness of ammunition and took good aim before each shot.

But far above the banging discharges of the guns, rose the bellowing of the walrus. "*U—RR—L—K! U—RR—L—K!*" was the cry they gave. The calves squealed; the cows fairly roared. The cries of the males, however, were more in defiance, and all except one old fellow stood their ground and made a tragic show of fight.

One by one they rolled over, crimsoning the white snow with their blood. By the boys' excellent shooting only two were wounded in such a way that they could get clear of the pan. One of these, a fat cow, floated. The other, a younger animal, floundered about and then flung up his hind flippers for a dive. But scarcely had his tusks split the water's surface when the Eskimo let drive. The harpoon struck the thick hide with a resounding thud, broke clear of its barb and floated. The line ran out with a whirr, carrying float and drag along with it.

"Let him go!" cried the Doctor as Rudd made a

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

motion to take a turn with the line around the forward bitts. "We'll get him later."

"But—" Rudd began to protest and then heard a chuckle. The Eskimo pointed astern where the walrus had already come up to blow. He was endeavoring in his wild rage to attack the float. But fast as he would rush for it the line attached to his own back would drag it under.

All boarded the floe and tied up the *Pole Star* while the necessary butchering was done.

"No skinning here, thank goodness!" exclaimed Norman.

Rudd remembered his sealing experience and asked why not.

"Because the Eskimos feed skin, hair, and all to their dogs. They leave it attached to the meat. As the thick hide is very indigestible it stays for a long time in the stomach of the dog and so makes it possible for him to go a great while without feeding. I have known them to serve out meals only once in ten days to a team."

"That's great reasoning!" laughed Rudd, wielding a long knife in a way he learned years before over the carcass of a Canadian moose. "Say, man, this fellow certainly is tough!"

Luckily the wind was carrying the pan in the direction the party wished to go. By the time the seven walrus were cut up and the wounded one re-

RED MEAT

covered from his float, the little point of land that marked Erik Harbor was in sight.

"We've got at least three tons of meat," observed the Doctor. "Of course it is out of the question to think of getting this ashore on one trip. Therefore I suggest that we don't take any at first but sail in light. We can get some fuel at the cache and return for the meat. Certainly we are justified in expending oil for such a supply of fresh meat as this."

As the plan met with instant approval the *Pole Star* was set adrift and her sail spread for the short tack across to the Harbor.

"Wonder if those bear cubs have been back to see their mother?" he muttered. "Say, Norman, did you know our expedition gave an entertainment to some polar bears last week? Boggsy of course went in and busted up the party, otherwise it would have been a great success."

But there was no sign of the marauders. With the seal-float raft four cases of fuel were quickly ferried out to the launch and she returned to the ice. The Doctor and Rudd remained at the cache to fix up the house the latter and Boggs had built of the cases. By nine P. M. the meat was all ashore and safely cached. The sledging party blew in later and reported having seen musk ox tracks just beyond the hill. As the harbor was free from ice and

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

well sheltered the *Pole Star* was anchored in real security.

"Things certainly are looking up!" exclaimed Rudd. "What do you think, Norman?"

"They are for me, anyway," was the prompt reply. "This time night before last I didn't know whether I was ever going to live to tell my tale or not!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE ARCTIC PALL

TWO days were occupied at the cache putting everything in shipshape order. The meat was buried under the rocks Eskimo fashion, and a protecting wall of flat stones piled around the cases to keep the bears out.

"How about the natives stealing our share of the walrus?" asked Rudd. After his experience with bears he felt distrustful of all arctic creatures.

"Not the slightest danger," said Dr. Barlow. "A meat cache is sacred to the Eskimo. He realizes that the man who laid it down may some day struggle up in **the** darkness of the arctic night and possibly in a starving condition. If he fails to find the cache as he left it he will certainly starve. Thus a man who has removed the meat can be said to be the traveler's murderer."

"But suppose a man finds himself in such a fix and knows a friend's cache is near by?"

"Under such circumstances he is justified in helping himself. It is Eskimo law, however, that he must at the earliest possible moment send word to the owner of the cache that it no longer exists."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Enough fuel was put aboard the *Pole Star* to take her around to the camp on the other side of the land. Then her available cargo and deck space were filled with provisions, including a good supply of meat which, the Doctor explained, could be used to remunerate the natives for their help.

The trip back was without incident. Several herds of walrus were passed, but no killing was done as there was no possibility of landing the meat along such forbidding shores. To slaughter the game wantonly would not only be a waste of ammunition, but a sin against the unwritten law of the wilderness.

Captain Pike was deeply affected by Norman's story about the *Erik*. "I have suspicions," he said fiercely, "that are better founded than I can divulge at present. But just let me get back and I'll have that gang of pirates behind the bars before you can say Jack Robinson!"

The Doctor did not agree. "I give Menon too much credit for cleverness to admit that he will open himself to any story that we may bring back."

"And also," added Norman, "you must remember that he is taking pains to keep the crew in the dark about the true state of affairs. They will almost unanimously support his actions from a point of view of safety to the ship and her crew."

The Doctor did his best to soothe the old Skipper.

THE ARCTIC PALL

"It's the old story, Pike. A fiend like Menon knows that beyond the limit of civilization a man must be measured by motives. If he appears to have acted to the best interests of his company, despite the true state of affairs, the worst that can be held against him is that he made an error of judgment."

But the Skipper was obdurate. "I refuse to discuss it any more," he declared with almost violent finality; "I know some things that you people don't. Menon believes he can get away with murder. He can't, no matter what you say. That's all there is to it!"

Thereafter the *Erik* as a topic of conversation was banned in the presence of her Captain.

Dr. Barlow exerted his greatest efforts and ingenuity to keep the party occupied. Not only was there vital need of preparing for the winter with utmost thoroughness, but he fully realized the effect of arctic isolation on the minds of men.

An example of what might happen later came in the week following their return from the cache. One of the usual summer storms which had been brewing to the south of west broke with great fury while the party slept. Boggs waked his companions with the cry, "I'm smothering!"

"How?" grunted the Doctor without even opening his eyes.

Rudd, startled, sat up to find he, too, was being

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

buried under the same white blanket that nearly covered Boggs' head and shoulder where he had drawn the skins over them. Drifting snow had swirled around the protected entrance of the hut and lay nearly a foot deep clear back to the center.

"Gorry, what a mess!" exclaimed Norman suddenly rolling over. His action was followed by a roar of fury from the Skipper that would have done justice to an angry walrus.

"Up everybody!" called the Doctor as cheerily as he could, "and clear this stuff out."

It took nearly an hour to get the furs cleaned of the powdery snow. Even then a great deal of it melted and soaked both blankets and skins. As a howling blizzard was in progress without, there was no means to work except inside the cramped and lightless rock hut. It was barely large enough to hold the original four who had built it. "The bigger the house, the more difficult it is to heat," had been the Doctor's slogan. And now with one extra, Norman, and also all the skins, supplies, and so on, the confusion and crowding was irritating in the extreme.

"Great stuff!" Rudd told Boggs in the early stages. It was really exciting to the boy to be cooped up in a rock igloo during a howling polar blizzard.

Boggs was of a different mind. Years before he had outgrown any thrill from unnecessary hardship.

THE ARCTIC PALL

"Glad you think so!" he growled, and tried to squeeze himself into a dry corner which had earlier been his bed. Instantly he withdrew and wailed, "Who put that puddle there?"

"Here you, Boggsy," laughed Dr. Barlow, "try this." The generous Doctor rolled up on his side in a way that made room for the bedless wretch despite the fact it jammed his own back against the painfully sharp points of rocks in the wall behind.

All that day the storm continued, and the following night. It was not safe to venture more than a few feet from the hut. The wind blew with such violence that it was impossible for any man to keep his feet. The drifting snow was a wall of gray and swirling obscurity that blinded even the dogs who had let it pile up over them in a warm blanket.

"Where are the Eskimos?" asked Rudd anxiously.

"Burrowed into that drift around the corner," said the Doctor. "They are used to this sort of business and can stow themselves away for a week or so without minding it."

"You don't mean to say this storm may last a week!"

"I certainly do. That is the reason I was so determined that we should have our shelter finished first of all. But even more than bodily shelter is the importance of keeping our minds off our troubles."

"Hanged if I see how we can do that," was the

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

dismal reply, punctuated by the drone of the gale outside.

Whereupon the Doctor set about organizing a society of promotion of goodwill in the hut. Its chief rule was that no one should sleep during the morning, and that every one should tell at least one story a day. "If we sleep at irregular times," he explained, "then the first thing we know we will be irritating one another by keeping each other awake, as well as getting ourselves into a nervous state through oversleep."

Captain Pike proved the most successful in the story-telling contests. Once he got started on a tale of whaling experiences he would run on for an hour or more. And the joy of it was that he never repeated himself, and never described an incident without making it more thrilling than the last one.

By the third day even this occupation began to pall. Norman and Rudd, who had been the closest friends, and really the liveliest of the party, began it with a quarrel. It seemed that Rudd slept by the west wall. Norman's bed was next. As the stove was at his feet and a case of biscuit topped by the Doctor's magnetic instruments beyond his head, there was no space in which to keep his sewing kit and other small belongings. Boggs had suggested using the chinks between the rocks in Rudd's wall as

THE ARCTIC PALL

shelves. In consequence Norman and Rudd divided these chinks, of which there were about a dozen.

Everything had gone peacefully until Rudd sat up and said truculently, "Dr. Barlow, I'd like to come over there and sleep by you."

"Nothing doing!" exclaimed Boggs. "I got here first."

"Aw, dry up," growled Norman, who knew what was coming.

The Doctor did not speak for a moment. Then, "Variety is the spice of life, Rudd," he laughed, "I think a little change might do us all good."

But Rudd was determined to have his wrongs published. "I've got to change," he said, irritatedly, "because Norman wakes me up all the time reaching over and trying to get his things out of the wall. Last night he dropped hot pipe ashes down my neck just as I was dreaming I was home."

At this the others roared with laughter. But Rudd's grouch was only magnified by the mirth he had caused.

"Guess the Society of Entertainment had better decorate you for that remark," laughed the Doctor.

But, despite the efforts of the three not concerned in the unfortunate incident, Rudd and Norman refused to speak to one another all that day, and when Norman's turn came to tell a story he remarked that he guessed he didn't have anything to say.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Finally the Doctor saw the unhappy possibilities of the incident and set about a serious discussion of it.

"Boys," he said, "I want you to see things in their right light. I am really glad this episode has occurred. We are in the midst of the arctic summer. There is plenty of food. Except for an occasional blow we have plenty of occupation, and we have retained our excellent health."

"I ain't," interrupted Boggs. "Got rheumatiz in two toes right now."

The Doctor's face became more grave. "When six months of darkness and bitter cold shut us in we shall all have 'rheumatiz in our toes' as Boggs complains of. Aches and pains and irritations will rack every nerve in our bodies. The utmost endurance and courage will be necessary to keep our spirits up. Now is the time to practice forbearance. If you lads are going to break off friendly relations after two or three days in a summer blow with the sun just behind the clouds, what on earth are you going to do when you are trapped in a two-weeks' blizzard without having seen the sun for months and with the mercury frozen solid in its bulb?"

"And nothing but rotten meat to eat," put in the Skipper. "Why I remember in the winter of 'eighty-five——"

"Please don't," whimpered Boggs. "I've heard

THE ARCTIC PALL

that there story afore from my Uncle Andrew and it allus turns my stomach!"

Rudd sat suddenly up with a grin. "Guess you're right, sir," he said heartily. "Norman, here's my hand on it. Let's stick it out as friends whatever happens."

"Sure pop!" was the quick retort. And the pair shook hands with a grip that was a promise to stick close through thick and thin.

The following morning dawned bright and clear. The land was transfigured. Spots of green grass and arctic poppies had disappeared under the snowy mantle that lay sparkling on every inch of rock and earth. The Eskimos appeared with their usual laughter and gayety, having slept through most of the storm. One of them approached Captain Pike with the suggestion that they have a meal with the white men. This request was of course granted. Hospitality was certainly due them after the help that had been given in the trip across after the *Pole Star*.

"They complain their seal meat has all gone," said the Skipper, "and want us to feed their dogs."

"But they must have had a ton of seal!" exclaimed Rudd. "What became of all that?"

The brown hunters protested that it was entirely used up. The dogs had been allowed to eat as much

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

as they wished during the storm when they weren't even working.

"That's the Eskimo for you, Pike," commented the Doctor. "He will lay away caches on the beach when he finds himself unable to transport the meat to his home. But as for planning his expenditure so that food will last until more can be got, he never thinks of such a thing."

"Let the idots starve," growled the Skipper. "Gorge themselves till they can't stand up, and a week later are boiling their pants for breakfast!"

"Don't be too harsh with them, Pike. They are just children. Think of it: no schools; no law except that of necessity; no one to answer to save their own consciences and appetites. Is it any wonder they cannot imagine a life ordered with the geometrical accuracy of our own?"

Argument proved to be of no avail with the natives. They stayed around long enough to get a good mugup of tea and then hitched up their teams sullenly for departure south.

"Good-by," Rudd told the old fellow who had been his teacher during their days together.

The hunter grabbed Rudd's hand, white-man fashion, and grinned. Then reaching into the load on his sledge he hauled out a coil of sealskin line and handed it to the boy. Such is the age-old

THE ARCTIC PALL

practice of man; the gift will speak when language fails.

Rudd silently watched the column of sledges crawl up the hill. Both Captain Pike and Dr. Barlow seemed not to mind the loss of the native visitors. Boggs and Norman declared they were glad to be rid of the "sponges" as they call them.

"Don't worry," said the Doctor, "they will get over this and be back soon as their stomachs are good and full again."

"But I hate to lose the chance to learn all the things they do," complained Rudd. "The old fellow, 'Metok,' I think his name was, might have showed me how to build a snow igloo if he had waited long enough to let the snow get in good shape."

"Didn't you learn a good deal as it was?"

"Yes, I did. I can build a rabbit snare of rocks now; and trap foxes by the talus slope; and cut sealskin into line; and fix my boots so they won't leak."

"Yes, and I bet you are twice as safe in this country now that you have some of the Eskimo's tricks up your sleeve. Wait till later and we can get a dog team for you. That is the real sport of the north."

Rudd's face fell. Instead of exulting in the possibility of winning that coveted skill which every

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

man desires who gets a taste of the fascinating north, he gave every sign of discouragement at the prospect.

"Heavens, lad!" exclaimed Dr. Barlow, "you're not homesick, are you?"

"No, it isn't that," was the slow reply.

"Well what?"

"I can scarcely explain it, sir, but somehow I have a queer feeling inside me that we shall never see those Eskimos again."

For a moment the Doctor started to laugh and then stopped. There was something in the seriousness of Rudd's speech that convinced him that the boy's premonition was true.

And it was.

CHAPTER XXII

EXCITEMENT

THE day the Eskimos left a council of war was held over the use of the *Pole Star*. Two trips to the cache had been made and there were now at the hut sufficient provisions to last through the better part of the winter.

"The danger is," observed the Doctor, "that if half our supplies are here and half fifty miles away we can never be sure that the other lot is safe. Bears may come again and do more damage. Ice may be driven upon the beach and carry some of the cases away. An unusual thaw may pop up in August and swamp it. A dozen accidents might make it necessary that we have those supplies."

The Skipper shook his head. "I don't care," he protested, "we have got to conserve fuel both for cooking and for the *Pole Star* to make it possible for us to get out in the next summer season."

Norman brought up the point that even if the launch got out under sail she ought to have engine power available in case the ice caught her. "Besides," he argued, "if we have to make a run for it nothing

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

would mean more than plenty of cooking fuel so that we might have hot food at all times."

A compromise was finally reached by following a suggestion coming from Boggs. He believed that it would be possible to sail around and back and secure more walrus at the same time. "There ain't no better way to be sure of a square meal than stackin' up some of them hippopotamuses!" was the way he put it.

"Very well, then," assented the Doctor. "The two boys and Boggs can go while Pike and I go forward with getting the camp shipshape."

"Humph!" growled the Skipper. "I've had about enough of this camp business for a while. Want to have a look around. Besides," he scowled at Norman, "this young fellow's story gives me a hunch the ship isn't out of her hole yet."

"Don't see why, sir," blurted Norman, feeling the Captain was in some way blaming him. "She's under way and bound south—I saw her!"

"Oh, all right—all right! But just the same I want to have a look around there myself; so I'm going."

"Guess I'll go, too," laughed the Doctor. "I don't want to miss anything."

So when the *Pole Star* set forth with her crazy sail she held the entire party. And it was a gay party, too. All had made up their minds to make the

EXCITEMENT

best of what Fate had thrust upon them. And, while the winter would surely be a tough experience, there was no basic reason why they shouldn't all live to tell the tale.

Contrary winds made the trip around longer than was anticipated. Also walrus were killed at two points. Landing the meat and caching it took the better part of three days. Thus nearly a week had elapsed before Erik Harbor was reached.

"Turn to, boys," said the Doctor as they landed on the familiar beach, "and let's get this stuff aboard. Every day we spend here we risk trouble in getting back. Ice conditions change overnight. I don't believe the Skipper wants to make the journey overland."

"That may be," retorted the Skipper, "but I'm going to have a little walk of my own right this minute." Whereupon he turned and started up the hill from which the whole gulf was visible.

"Poor old scout!" exclaimed the Doctor, when the Skipper had got out of earshot. "He feels the loss of his ship a good deal more than he shows."

"Should think he would!" exclaimed Norman, "after a lot of crooks stole it right out from under his very nose."

The Doctor failed to agree. "No, Norman, I can't bring myself to feel the same. Mr. Menon was personally sponsored by a member of the firm that owns

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

the ship. And, so I understand, the Captain got particular instructions from young Dinger, a junior partner, to give Mr. Menon all the authority possible."

"Well, he got it!" burst Rudd, unable to contain his feelings when the subject got around to the First Officer.

Boggs' fingers were twitching and his mouth working for some fitting expression of the same emotion when a faint halloa floated down from above the talkers.

"Skipper's trying to hail us," said Dr. Barlow. "See if you can get him."

Again came the long throaty cry of the old seaman.

"He's p'inting, sir," said Boggs.

"At what?" Rudd said, and started on a run toward the nearest slope. His heart beat faster and he felt a strange choking sensation in his throat. Yet, strange to say, he could not for the world have explained why. He had given up hope of seeing the ship again. He somehow knew positively that the Eskimos wouldn't come back. There was no other source of supplies that might be expected. And, finally, there could not possibly be any hope of a relief ship till next year, for the good and simple reason that friends at home would not suspect anything was wrong until Mr. Menon and his crew arrived late in the summer—if then.

EXCITEMENT

From the slope he could make out only the usual expanse of sea and ice. Distant shores of Baffin Land formed a brownish gray haze on the horizon. Only the shrill cries of a few sea birds and a distant dark patch on a floe where walrus slept indicated that the vast and terrible isolation contained any life besides the little group of deserted men on the beach.

"He thinks he can see something out there," called Norman. "How about it?"

Rudd gave another long look and yelled back, "A herd of walrus, that's all."

"Fiddle!" said the Doctor. "The old fellow has gone bug-house over hunting. Let's get busy now, and make some progress."

No more attention was paid to the Skipper until he dragged himself into camp some time later, pretty well done up by the climb. He was well along in years for the heavy strain of dragging through snow and over rocky moraines left by past glaciers.

"Woof!" he panted, and seated himself on a case of pemmican. "Stiff climb that—but worth it."

"Yes," said the Doctor, rolling a ten-gallon tin of fuel to his shoulder. "We saw the walrus, too."

"Is that all you saw?" The Skipper took on a queer expression that caused the Doctor to pause.

"Did *you* see more, Pike?"

"Well—hum—well, yes," He took out his pipe and began to fill it with maddening slowness.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

“What? Out with it!”

By this time all had gathered about the Skipper as if realizing that some momentous secret was about to be divulged. Boggs' mouth hung open and his eyes popped almost out of his head.

“It wasn't——?” blurted the fireman. Somehow he couldn't articulate the word, whatever it was.

“Fine view from up there,” announced the Skipper.

The Doctor grabbed him by his shoulder. “Stop it, Pike. What was it, anyway?”

“Only the *Erik*.”

“*Only the Erik!*” cried the four listeners in chorus.

The next instant Rudd and Norman were racing for the hill. Nothing would do but they must satisfy themselves that the ship was really in sight. And deep down in the hearts of each was a throbbing joy at the prospect of getting home after all without having to spend the winter north.

“It is!” shouted Rudd after a squint through his one-eyed binoculars. “I can see her masts and bridge and smokestack. She's over there behind that big berg.”

“Righto!” exclaimed the incredulous Norman. Then his gladness disappeared swiftly as it had come. “But what difference does it make while those blinking crooks are on board her?”

The others had already reached this state of mind by the time the two returned to camp. Dr. Barlow

EXCITEMENT

counseled delaying long enough to find out just what the ship seemed to be doing.

"If she's on her way, we can't catch her, possibly. And if she's back for us, she'll come right here."

"It ain't right to wait!" lamented Boggs. "I want to get back for that 'baccy I left in my bunk. Some sea cook's probably got it already!"

The Doctor comforted the poor fellow by pointing out that if Mr. Menon did not want them aboard he would have no difficulty in keeping the motor boat at bay.

"Indeed, our arrival would embarrass him into almost any desperate course to get rid of us."

"Right, Barlow," agreed the Skipper. "If they've had nerve enough to mutiny and steal the ship, they ain't going to stop at blowing the *Pole Star* out of the water if we try to come aboard when they don't want us. We would be about as popular as a bunch o' wasps in prayer meeting."

Norman's idea was that ice conditions might have forced them back.

"I remember," he said, "that the Chief was apparently in some doubt whether they could get through Fury and Hecla Straits or not."

"Was she heading north?" asked the Doctor.

The Skipper scratched his head. "Looked more as if she were drifting," said he.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Heading nearly this way when I saw her," put in Rudd, "and the funny part of it was that there didn't seem to be much ice around her. I bet they're coming over here to take back some of the provisions."

"Indian givers!" ejaculated Boggs.

"Then we'd better hide," said Rudd.

The Doctor held up his hand. "Let's don't go off half-cocked, men. The ship is far enough away to give us plenty of time to act. If she is coming over here, we might betake ourselves to the hills. But if the crowd aboard are still unfriendly, they certainly would seize the *Pole Star*, besides much of the cache. If she is bound north, we can wait and be sure and then endeavor to join her. She would undoubtedly stop for fresh water somewhere up the coast."

"How about their outnumbering us?" said Norman.

"I was coming to that. Since they do outnumber us so greatly, we can only hope to combat them through strategy rather than through physical strength. If they land here and find us in a cheerful humor and not worried about the *Erik's* absence, I wouldn't be surprised to see Mr. Menon back-walk his plan altogether and be willing to take us back aboard as if nothing had happened. Further, if he should make a show of trying to work his will on

EXCITEMENT

us, I believe a simple but unyielding refusal to countenance any such absurd proposition would carry conviction to the men. They would swing to Captain Pike in a minute if they thought he was being wronged. And I don't believe money could swerve them if he were present."

"Thank you, Barlow," said the Skipper in gruff appreciation. "I believe you are correct in your surmise."

Thus, instead of immediate action to overtake the *Erik* or flee from her captors, a quiet supper of walrus, biscuit, and tea was prepared. While the meat was boiling, Norman and Rudd ferried out enough fuel to fill the *Pole Star's* tanks. It would never do to start the chase and then be forced to abandon it at a critical point.

"Some exciting—what?" exclaimed Rudd.

"Sure is," agreed Norman. "I feel as if I were mixed up in some kind of pirate tale where the enemy was always running off with my ship and money, and I was pulling myself out of holes by my boot-straps."

Conversation lagged at the meal. No one could keep his eye off the point in the ice-dotted horizon where the *Erik* lay. Sometimes her masts were faintly visible. More often though she floated out of sight behind some massive iceberg.

"How are we going to tell when to act?" asked

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd, growing impatient with the long wait. "I don't believe she's under way at all. Seems just to be fooling around going nowhere."

"Hanged if I don't believe you're right," agreed the Doctor. "If she doesn't show some signs of movement pretty soon, I think we might as well take a run out to her."

"Good idea to wait till late," suggested Norman. "We might be able to sneak up on them and catch them by surprise."

"I doubt it," Dr. Barlow said. "The men could be awakened and be manning the rail long before we could carry out any sort of attack. Remember you are in the arctic, and even at midnight would have to approach in broad daylight."

Through the long hours of the evening while the sun sank lower and lower the anxious little party watched the ship. There was something pathetic in the sight of five strong men abandoned in such a desert as this, their ship in plain view, yet unable to hasten aboard her for the welcome that should have been waiting. By eleven o'clock the sun was but ten or fifteen degrees above the northern horizon. A soft pinkish glow tinted the hilltops and the ice. The wind had dropped. Silence of summer ruled the peaceful scene.

Suddenly the Doctor leaped from the biscuit tin on which he had been squirming for half an hour.

EXCITEMENT

"I can't stand this business any longer! Let's take a chance and go."

His suggestion received unanimous approval. Five minutes later the wanderers were aboard the *Pole Star* puffing her way briskly in the direction of the *Erik*.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DERELICT

COURSE was set not for the *Erik*, but for a line of icebergs to the northward.

"Might as well play safe," said the Doctor. "If we see them first and gather some idea what they are about it will be a decided tactical advantage."

Norman added that he believed there was a better chance than the Doctor thought to overcome the mutinous crew aboard the ship.

"I happen to know," he said, "that Mr. Menon is being much easier on them than Captain Pike ever was."

"Ha, popularity game!" ejaculated the Skipper.

"Exactly, sir. He believes that by giving them extra privileges and more leeway aboard ship he can gain their backing that much more solidly."

"In what particular way is he easier?" asked Rudd.

"Well, instead of having several people on watch at a time, he lets all hands sleep in except a wheelman. Even the lookout is not present in his barrel except when there is ice close to the ship. And the man at the wheel is selected by lot. That, according to Mr.

THE DERELICT

Menon's way of thinking, makes it fair for every man."

"May be fair," growled the Skipper, "but it ain't seamanlike, and I bet my wad it gets him into trouble afore he's gone very far!"

"Yes," said the Doctor, "and loyalty won by such means is not true loyalty. It's like the treacherous affection of a wild animal that will fawn upon his trainer so long as a sop of meat is thrown him, but will turn with bared fangs the moment the meat fails or his mood changes."

"Anyway," went on Norman, who was not so much interested in the philosophical side of the question, "I figure that there will be only one man on watch and he is very likely to be half asleep with the state of discipline that exists aboard. We probably can sail up without being seen or heard. If then we can board and get the foc'sle hatch dogged down before any one comes to life, we shall have the ship at our mercy."

"How 'bout them as lives aft?" asked Boggs, anxiously. He was a little squeamish at the idea of these warlike plans.

"Easy enough. There's only the Chief and Mr. Menon. Reggie Caverly bunks there but he certainly doesn't count."

"Norman's right," put in the Doctor. "If we can imprison those forward, our five guns will cer-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

tainly cover the cabin mess and the man on watch."

Thus it was agreed upon to creep up astern of the ship where the man at the wheel would least likely be looking and steal aboard somewhere near the bow. The moment the hatch leading to the crew's quarters was locked the attack would be led aft as swiftly as possible. Once the Skipper was back in power there was no great reason to believe the ship's company could not be convinced of the error of their ways. Besides, the law would uphold any disciplinary measures necessary to put the proper commanding officer in his place.

"You've forgot the engine room," said Boggs.

"Oh, no," came back Norman. "You could lead an army aboard without disturbing any one down there. The condenser is in such rotten shape it drowns out any noise on deck. Besides, I don't think any of the black gang have fallen for Mr. Menon. He called them cowards, and they won't forget it soon."

Conditions grew more favorable as the *Pole Star* reached the vicinity of the *Erik*. The vessel was headed north and seemed to have stopped for some reason. To the southward of her lay strung an irregular column of bergs, each many times larger than the little craft. About three miles down this column the *Pole Star* swung in and headed up towards the ship. As there was just enough breeze

THE DERELICT

to give her steerageway, she bore down upon the *Erik* at a speed of not over three knots. This put the time of attack at approximately two A. M.

"Exactly right," said Dr. Barlow. "That will give the fellow on mid-watch a chance to get good and drowsy, and all below will just be getting their second wind in their bunks."

"They clean fires about one-thirty," said Boggs.

"Haven't cleaned fires since I sighted her," averred the Skipper. "Not a flicker of smoke has come up her pipe."

"Do you think they could have let the fires die out?" asked Rudd.

Norman shook his head. "Doubt it. Even Mr. Menon realized it wouldn't be safe while there's ice within fifty miles to let steam drop. If he got nipped, there'd be no way to run without the engines. Besides, as I told you, the men below are not behind the First Officer. They are looking after their boilers whether he wants to be popular or not."

The Doctor here stopped the conversation for a word of caution. "Remember, men," said he, "that we've got to keep our heads. Don't shoot unless it's absolutely necessary. Have your magazines loaded; and keep a cartridge in the chamber at all times. Be ready to act at a moment's notice. But use judgment, whatever you do."

"Right!" agreed the Skipper, enthusiastically.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"The first thing we know that squad of crooks will swear we attacked them without provocation, and we'll be in jail after all. Great sea-lawyer that fellow Menon is; we've got to watch him."

Rudd took his rifle from its case with mixed feelings. He had enjoyed the thrill of the walrus hunt, and he had experienced a certain stimulation at the prospect of spending a winter in the arctic regions under such circumstances as the party faced. But to prepare for a hand-to-hand encounter with other men was a little too much out of romance to be fun. Even when he had fired at Reggie he knew that he would only wound him if possible. Now he might have to shoot to kill or be killed himself.

About half a mile from the ship the *Pole Star* was moored to the outer edge of a low berg in order that a reconnaissance might be made of ice conditions ahead. It was so difficult to maneuver the launch with her small sail and the light wind, that it would be disastrous to get too close to the *Erik* and discover that no more cover lay ahead.

Norman and Rudd crawled to the summit of the ice knob and studied the ship and the ice that lay between them and her.

"Plenty of growlers," was Norman's estimate.

"Sure is," said Rudd. "We won't have the slightest trouble keeping out of sight."

They then scrutinized the vessel herself. Dr.

THE DERELICT

Barlow had pointed out the necessity of this, despite Norman's assurance that no trouble would be met from men on deck.

"Certainly looks deserted, don't she?" Rudd's keen eyes swept over every visible inch of deck, rigging, and bulwarks.

"Just what I told you," retorted Norman. "Can you see the man at the wheel?"

"I think I can. No—it's a sort of boxlike thing they've rigged by the wheel."

"Aha—a shelter for the poor fellow on watch. More popularity stuff. Built him a little calaboose to snooze in while he's got the safety of the ship in his hands. Fine seagoing trick—what!" Norman's tones spoke the contempt that his words could not equal.

Captain Pike could scarcely believe them when they described the watch box that appeared to have been built on the bridge for the comfort of the helmsman and had to go up and take a look for himself.

He returned shaking his head. "The boys are right, Barlow. I can't see the helmsman at all. And the wheel is out of sight behind this windbreak or whatever it is they've stuck up there."

"So much the better, Pike. Now all we have to do is to ease in close enough to the side with our mast unstepped and he will never even see us go by."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

As the motor boat was soon within a quarter of a mile of the *Erik* all talking was done in undertones. Greatest care was taken not to bump any gun on the deck or make any other unnecessary noise that might warn the unsuspecting mutineers of the party's approach.

"Be sure your lines are clear," commanded the Doctor in a stage whisper.

With scarcely a ripple the little *Pole Star* crept slowly closer and closer. The night was still and clear. Northeast swung the low and flaming orb of the midnight sun. Occasionally there came a distant rumble of an overturning berg, or the wrenching grind of heavy pans brought together by the tide.

The ship seemed absolutely without life. She was not under way as those aboard the launch had suspected for some time, but lay dead in the water. The helmsman evidently had found his watch box to his liking, for, in the entire time since the look from the berg, no one had seen him emerge for a look around. Even had he done so, it was unlikely he could have spotted the *Pole Star*. She was white and her passengers stood like statues about her deck. To an uninterested person she would easily have passed for a growler of dirty ice.

A hundred yards from the ship Dr. Barlow signaled to unstep the mast. Immediately the shrouds

THE DERELICT

were cast loose, and Norman, Rudd, and Boggs lifted the light spar from its step. So skillful was their work that not so much as a tap was audible when it landed on deck and was secured with a light lashing. Norman at once took up the homemade scull of sealskin and harpoon shaft and went aft to aid the boat in case she began to drift clear of the ship. Luck, however, proved to be on her side. She kept her way long enough to reach the *Erik's* quarter. Rudd stood in the bow with a boathook and fender and managed to keep her off, at the same time drawing her in exactly parallel to the vessel's side. So far there was no sound or sign of life on the *Erik's* deck. On the launch all stood ready to board, with guns loaded and cocked, the moment any alarm went up. At the same time, in accordance with Dr. Barlow's instructions, each was equally ready to exhibit the utmost friendliness if that should prove to be the spirit in which they were received.

The first difficulty came just abaft the bridge. Here the port whaleboat had been swung. Its davits were now trained outboard and the boat was missing.

"Probably explains why she's not under way," thought Dr. Barlow. "They've had the sense to go after walrus while the chance is here. First sign of sanity that Menon has shown."

The situation was, however, full of peril for the party's plan to get aboard undiscovered. The

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

whaleboat's falls hung down, nearly dipping their blocks in the water. In consequence it would have been practically impossible to get the launch past without either banging the blocks against her side, or by moving them causing a fatal squeaking in the tackle above. Either accident would immediately disclose the boat's presence to the man at the wheel, unless he were sleeping soundly—which was unlikely even under the conditions Norman had described.

For a few minutes things looked bad. The launch was brought to a stop and all looked to the Doctor for advice. None dared even whisper in the tensity of the moment. With his usual resourcefulness he had a solution at hand. Drawing his jackknife from his pocket he passed it forward and signed Rudd to cut the blocks from their falls. A minute later both blocks lay on deck and the *Pole Star* crept silently forward, the fall ends dragging harmlessly over her deck.

Near the waist of the ship was another touchy point. The *Erik* was cut so low here that all had to lie flat on the *Pole Star's* deck to avoid being seen. Rudd managed to reach out with his boathook and snag the mooring staples in time to pull her ahead. Once he missed his hold and for a desperate instant it looked as if the boat would drift clear and be discovered after all. But with acrobatic agility, the lad recovered his hold, and three minutes later the

THE DERELICT

launch lay safely under the shadow of the forward deck house, well out of sight of any one on the bridge.

Dr. Barlow raised his hand as a signal for Norman to go over the rail. He was detailed to close the forecastle hatch. Rudd followed immediately with his own and Norman's rifle. Then came the Doctor and Captain Pike. Boggs stayed on the launch long enough to secure her well in case the impending fight should occupy a longer time than was anticipated.

Rudd and the two older men stayed in the lee of the deck house until Norman returned with word that he had the hatch well secured. "Not a grunt out of them!" he whispered.

"Did you see the bridge?" asked the Doctor, with his lips to Norman's ear.

"No—couldn't quite from where I stood. I was afraid to take too long."

"Are we ready?" asked the Doctor, looking over his little boarding party. He counted the gripped rifles and set faces. Rudd's particularly was molded into an expression of determination that gave the leader a little thrill of satisfaction. "Let's go then," he commanded in a low voice.

Rudd and Norman crept around to starboard, the Skipper and Dr. Barlow tiptoed along the port passageway. Rudd stepped out almost at the same

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

instant that the Doctor did. His ears strained to catch the "Hands up!" he knew the Doctor would give to the helmsman.

No such word came. The bridge was empty. What had looked like a watch box on the bridge was now made out to be only a pile of packing cases.

Swiftly the four boarders made their way aft. Dr. Barlow leading, they descended to the cabin. Like the bridge, it too was devoid of any human being.

"Quick, go forward," exclaimed the Skipper. "They may have seen us and are lying in ambush waiting to see what we are up to."

But at that instant Boggs nearly fell into the cabin with word that he had peered into the crew space through a port in the bow and discovered that every bunk was empty.

"Try the engine room," ordered the Doctor.

Rudd and Norman dashed out and clambered down the ladder. They took their rifles with them, too. It was too uncanny to believe—that the whole ship could be deserted and not a sign to indicate why.

The engine room and fireroom were also empty.

"Search the ship!" directed the Skipper.

The command was carried out to the letter. Rudd's report was characteristic of the others'. He said: "Captain, I can't find the trace of a man.

THE DERELICT

And yet from the looks of the galley, the quarters, the decks, your entire crew might have left ten minutes ago. Indeed I would put it at less than ten minutes except that fires in the galleys and boilers are out, and both are cold. This ship was deserted not later than yesterday."

"Well, now wouldn't that frazzle your ratlines!" said the Skipper.

Boggs sat down on an after bitt and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DESPERATE CHANCE

THE *Erik* had been deserted. There was no doubt about that. The shock of it seemed to numb the mental faculties of those who had boarded her. They had been so keyed up to some sort of resistance, probably real battle, that the funereal silence of the vessel gave them a feeling of unreality, as if this were all a bad dream from which they might soon awaken.

Dr. Barlow was the first to regain his balance and suggest action. "There are two tasks we have immediately before us," said he. "First, we have got to ascertain the circumstances under which the ship was deserted, as well as the causes therefor. Second, and tremendously important, we must take steps to insure her safety."

"But you can't man a ship this size with five hands," demurred the Skipper.

Dr. Barlow, realizing the old fellow's depressed state of mind, did not attempt to dispute the point with him. It was Norman who pointed out the possibilities.

A DESPERATE CHANCE

"We can certainly put sail on her," said he. "If we can work across to Erik Harbor, she would then be safe for the winter."

"She's got a list—didn't you notice it?" argued the Skipper, apparently determined to have the catastrophe as dreadful as possible.

"That's the reason," said the Doctor, "that I want every one to take a part of the ship and examine it at once. We can then determine what our course had best be."

Rudd and Norman took the crew space. Boggs took the hold. The Skipper and Dr. Barlow stayed in the cabin to study the log and other papers. For an hour the business of inspection and examination went on. A squad of Pinkerton detectives could not have done a better job. And despite the fact that no one had so far had any sleep that night, the old *Erik* had probably not suffered such a searching scrutiny since her day of acceptance. As far as sleep was concerned, any rest was out of the question. From the Skipper to Boggs, every one's curiosity about the extraordinary mystery was too keen not to satisfy it this very night if possible.

The party gathered in the cabin to report.

"First," began the Doctor, "I will say that Pike and I have gone over what papers we find and can locate no evidence that anything was wrong with the ship. A very careful entry was made in the book

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

of temperatures, which was kept in the Captain's cabin, to the effect that weather was fair and pleasant two days ago. Since that time there has been no entry. The log is missing. Other papers of identification are practically intact. Summing up this evidence, Pike and I agree that while the ship was deserted in haste, all hands left together led by whomsoever was in command. Under no other conditions would the log have been taken and other papers left behind."

"Probably didn't have sense enough to take the others," growled the Skipper.

The Doctor turned to Rudd. "How about the living quarters?"

Rudd held outspread his open empty hands. "Nothing, sir. Not a vestige of proof one way or the other. Blankets were missing from some of the bunks; but mattresses were in place and ditty bags intact. I should think the men would at least have taken their clothing with them."

"Yes," agreed Norman. "Even in shipwreck a sailorman wants to grab his bag and kit. Looks to me as if these fellows must have been doped and dumped overboard, instead of leaving willingly."

"How about the state of neatness?" questioned the Doctor.

"Perfect," Rudd continued. "It must have been around ten A. M. when they left. The place was

A DESPERATE CHANCE

tidied up and the noon meal was being cooked. Hot bread was in the oven, though burned to a crisp now. A pot of seapie is still on the back of the stove ready to eat. Mess gear is neatly stowed and none missing. The Mate's slop chest he used to keep under one of the bunks is unlocked, but every article is piled tidily and a list of contents is lying on top. Several pipe racks still hold their pipes."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Boggs; "Broke me pipe yesterday."

The Doctor turned a stern eye on the fireman. "No looting whatever we do. If it becomes necessary to use what is left, we shall do it in an orderly fashion after making a proper inventory."

Norman verified what Rudd had said and added some of the details about conditions on deck. "Gear is all in the best of shape," said he. "Lines are coiled down and tackle rigged for sea."

"Beastly dirty, I'd say," interjected the Skipper.

"Yes, sir, it is, compared to the spic and span way you used to keep her. Don't take long for a ship's decks to get run down after discipline eases off."

"Did you have a look at that bowsprit forward?"

"Yes, sir. Jury stays had been rove off and head-sails can now be spread as before. Just as Rudd

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

says, I see absolutely no reason for the ship ever having been abandoned."

Boggs' turn came next. His testimony was so mixed up with condemnation of the whole affair that it was with difficulty that the others were able to get at the meat of his inspection. However, his story was essentially the same as that of the two boys: everything shipshape and no visible key to the riddle. Boiler fires had died out of their own accord, but the boilers themselves were quite undamaged. The engine was ready for use the minute steam could be got on it. Coal was out on the fireroom floor and a shovel lay at the furnace door as if it had been dropped this same night.

"I tell you," Dr. Barlow solemnly announced, "this is just another of those great mysteries of the sea. Many a ship has been found just as the *Erik*—utterly abandoned and absolutely without reason to explain, even meals spread upon the table. I cannot be sure that we shall not fathom the *Erik's* secret; but I should not be surprised to have that the case."

The Skipper banged his fist upon the table and rose bristling with anger. "I don't follow you, Barlow," he roared, "this is no wild yarn brought in by a drunken sailor. This is fact—my ship! I know by my own eyes she has been basely stolen and in cowardice deserted. I'm going to find out

A DESPERATE CHANCE

why if it takes me the rest of my life. And I'm going to see those—those"—the old fellow nearly choked in his effort to find a proper epithet—"those *polecats*," he finally blurted, "rot in jail before I'm done!" He sat down panting with emotion.

"Your sentiments are just, Captain," went on the Doctor quietly. "But we shall make greatest progress toward the vengeance you so resolutely desire by applying cool reason to the present situation. We must act definitely and at once."

"What would you suggest, sir?" asked Rudd, anxious to put an end to the discussion which he felt was none too fruitful.

"Getting her into Erik Harbor at once," was the prompt reply.

"But the wind is against us," said Norman.

"Quite right. But you must remember that the launch has a powerful engine. In St. Johns she was used to shift anchorages and towed the *Erik* half across the harbor."

"Is there fuel enough left?" asked Rudd.

"Of course. We had about ten thousand gallons in the forepeak hold when we started."

Here the Skipper came in with, "Did you notice those cases piled on the bridge we thought were a shelter for the helmsman? They were cases of fuel. And I'm a sea cook if they haven't been emptied."

"The heck you say!" ejaculated Rudd, and dashed

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

up the ladder. On the bridge he seized a case from the pile. When full it weighed over seventy pounds.

"It's true!" groaned Rudd. The box slipped into his arms as if it were full of feathers. He tried the others. All were empty. At word of this serious find, search was at once made of the hold in which the rest of the fuel had been stowed. Every case had disappeared!

"I see it all now!" exclaimed Norman. "When they found I had taken the *Pole Star*, Mr. Menon didn't want to risk my coming back and getting filled up with fuel."

"Also," said the Doctor, "it proves even more conclusively that his action was premeditated."

Just then Boggs came in with the cheering news that the wind had shifted and sail might be used to work the ship west into her harbor.

"Got to be quick then," advised the Skipper. "This wind means a change of weather."

All immediately turned to getting canvas on the *Erik*. As there was no steam on the donkey engine sails had to be hoisted by hand. This proved a heavy and tedious task. It was after seven before the entire set were in place and the ship making way. However, as the breeze had freshened, she went up to over five knots and soon opened the two low points that marked the gateway to her refuge. Captain Pike took the wheel when she approached the anchor-

A DESPERATE CHANCE

age and hove her to with the skill of a true seaman. The other four, standing by halyards, let them go with a run. Rapidly the chunky little hull lost headway and Norman let go the anchor in five fathoms with the ship almost dead in the water.

"Who says five men can't handle her?" shouted the Doctor.

"Can make a windjammer out of her," retorted the Skipper, "yes. But them valves and pistons below is meant to kick the old girl into speed. And we can't so much as make steam on her with the handful we are."

"Anyway, we've got a place to live that ain't a rabbit hutch!" was Boggs' heartfelt comment.

Rudd and Norman fully agreed, but felt it better not to insult the Doctor's stone house which had stood them in very good stead.

The first thing every one did after the ship had been well secured was to turn in and make up for lost sleep. In the past seventy-two hours the party had had scarcely four hours' sleep apiece. And the past thirty-six had been so full of hard work and anxiety that even the rugged Skipper, used as he was to sleepless nights and days at sea, felt the strain and disappeared into his cabin as soon as possible.

Boggs happily appointed himself cook and had steaming coffee and beans ready early next morning.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Gosh!" exclaimed Rudd, "I never realized how heavenly real food could taste."

"Another advantage of the arctic," smiled the Doctor.

After his fourth cup of black coffee the Skipper began to loosen up with plans for the winter. He commenced by arousing the party's curiosity when he said: "There's a little secret I've kept from you, Barlow. Something nice, too. I'd keep it till Christmas, but we may need it before then."

"Out with it, Pike," laughed the other. "We can have it for a birthday present."

But the Skipper wanted a few preliminaries. "It has to do with our wintering here. And I want to be sure we start right. I suppose you're agreed this is the best place for the ship?"

"I do," nodded the Doctor. "It would be too great a risk to attempt to work her out by sail so late in the season. And I'm afraid we couldn't manage her engines."

"Then," the Skipper continued, "I say we move entirely into the cabin. We can rig the galley stove by the hatch yonder and use it for heating as well as cooking. The forward part of the ship can be locked up. With snow blocks we can bank up the outer walls aft here and be snug and comfortable as long as we want."

A DESPERATE CHANCE

"Great!" burst from Rudd involuntarily. "And there'll be plenty to eat, too."

The Skipper winked at Dr. Barlow. "Strange how these lads can't get their minds off their stomachs, isn't it?"

But Dr. Barlow let the humor pass unnoticed. His face had settled into a study that brought out every line and wrinkle. For several minutes he sat in deep thought without speaking. The change from his usual cheery mien was so marked that all fell into silence with him, wondering what problem his unerring foresight had discovered for them. Finally he looked up.

"I hate to throw cold water on these plans," said he; "But if I were able I'd leave the *Erik* at once for good and all."

"*What!*" Boggs nearly screamed. The prospect of losing his comfortable bunk and daily beans horrified him.

"Yes," the Doctor went on, "I believe at the bottom of my heart that we have a good chance to thwart Menon's plot even now. And I'd propose it if only we had fuel."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Norman. "The bunkers are full."

"No. I mean not coal, but oil—gas for the *Pole Star*." The Doctor spread his strong hands on the table and studied the solemn faces before him.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Men, I believe I have fathomed part of this mystery. I believe the First Officer deliberately abandoned the *Erik* when the chance offered. I believe, after what Norman told us about the fake leak, that the men were led to fear the ship would sink. You know we found a good deal of water in her bilges, and somewhat of a list on her. Thus they left her willingly."

"But why should they go?" cried Rudd.

"That I can't guess. Probably some deep-laid scheme we shall not learn till we get back. The point is that Menon and his party will probably be able to carry out his full plan if we don't turn up in time to head him off."

"But you admit we can't work the *Erik* out," argued the Skipper, "and the *Pole Star* could never weather the ice and gales we'd meet in the North Atlantic this time of year."

"Quite so," agreed the Doctor.

"Well, what else is there—ye can't *walk* home!"

"No, Pike. But if we had fuel for the *Pole Star* we might negotiate the Northwest Passage and get to Alaska in time for the last ship south. If we caught it, we would nab Menon with the goods on."

For a moment no one spoke. The proposal was so daring, so desperate, so completely unexpected, that all were struck dumb by it.

"Is it possible, sir?" faltered Norman.

A DESPERATE CHANCE

"Quite. Provided weather and ice conditions are reasonably favorable we will have a very fair chance of winning. You know the *Pole Star* has a high-speed propeller aboard that will drive her at nearly twenty knots."

As if coming out of a trance the Skipper sprang to his feet. "You don't mean to say you think we could really get there in time to meet Menon?"

"I certainly do. That's the point in the plan. The *Erik* could be sent for next year."

The Skipper's hands clenched. For an instant it looked as if he were going to attack Dr. Barlow.

"And you say that all you need is fuel for the boat?" he roared.

"That's all, Pike."

"Well, then, I'll tell you my secret. I've got over a thousand gallons of gas stowed away on this ship that no one ever knew anything about!"

XXV

THE RACE BEGINS

THE Skipper's startling announcement that he had 1,000 gallons of fuel aboard the *Erik* demanded immediate explanation.

"Experience," said he, "has taught me that of all items of arctic equipment fuel is the most important. Man can gather meat, build shelter, and contrive garments in the North. But fuel in safe quantities is not to be had."

"My idea, exactly," put in the Doctor, "in fitting us out with so much kerosene."

"Correct, Barlow. Only you didn't take adversity sufficiently into consideration. When Dinger Brothers offered me this command I insisted on a fresh-water tank directly under my cabin. As the crew had not then been assembled, none of my men suspected the existence of this tank. I had it filled with fuel and a forged-steel padlock put on. I wear that key around my neck." The Skipper here reached inside his flannel shirt and drew out a long key. "There's the key to our future, gentlemen!"

"And Menon's fate!" exclaimed the Doctor.

From that dramatic moment the party's life be-

THE RACE BEGINS

came one of stirring action. The tank proved full. Its contents were hastily drawn off into containers or poured into the *Pole Star's* 100-gallon drums.

"Every minute counts!" was the Doctor's slogan.

Norman and Rudd put their dash and spirit into assembling supplies. Only the most concentrated food was admitted. Chocolate, pemmican, biscuit, and tea were the chief features of diet. Only two rifles and a thousand rounds of ammunition were to be taken. This was a race. The chance of having to winter halfway through the Passage must be hazarded.

"We'll have to depend on the Eskimos if we get stuck!" declared Dr. Barlow. "Speed is our sole aim now."

"But are you sure we can find them?" asked Rudd.

"Fairly, yes. Stefansson discovered a tribe of what he termed blond Eskimo around Coronation Gulf about halfway across. The people were friendly. Indeed, they never had seen a white man before and looked on him as a god!"

In less than twenty-four hours the *Pole Star* was ready to start. A new sail had been cut from the *Erik's* supply of canvas and a spare mast lashed along the rail. The cabin was filled with fuel tins. Every available inch of deck space was crowded with cases of pemmican and equipment. Each man

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

carried one spare set of clothing. Besides actual necessities every ounce of weight was dispensed with. Even the Skipper's navigating outfit consisted of but one small sextant and nautical tables. The Doctor's medical kit was perilously condensed. Boggs, to his sorrow, had to abandon a fine pair of walrus tusks he had collected.

"You can get them next year when we rescue the *Erik*," the Doctor consoled him. "Until then we are going to put up the fight of our lives to beat Menon home!"

"How about mess gear?" asked Norman.

"A pot for boiling, one for tea. No more," was the determined reply. "We are overloaded anyway, and cannot risk another half inch of freeboard."

Before shoving off the Skipper insisted that extra precautions be taken to leave the ship in the greatest possible security. By means of a kedge anchor she was warped in until her keel rested on the sandy bottom, which was very soft at this point. As the tide was low at the time, she would thereafter ride easily; the shallow water would prevent any heavy ice drifting in on her. Extra lines were run to the crosstrees from large boulders ashore to steady her in case she got into difficulties with the season ice. Every sea valve was inspected and the engine parts well slushed up with grease.

THE RACE BEGINS

"We may be back here yet," counseled the Skipper a little wistfully.

The Doctor, however, would not cater to any weakening. "Not on your life, Pike. We're out to avenge the *Erik*—and we're going to succeed!"

Departure was without formality. Up to the last moment all five men were zealously engaged in aiding the precipitate change of plans. Boggs scrambled on and off the launch so often that he several times declared himself ready for the grave. Neither of the boys had time for their usual bantering of the fireman. They were hustling cases and tins out of the ship's hold and over the side with slam-bang speed. Dr. Barlow and the Skipper directed the work, but lost no opportunity to lend physical aid when possible. By midnight everything was aboard.

"We can't stop to sleep," announced the Doctor. "I'll take the first watch, and the rest of you can turn in on deck."

Boggs started his engine; Rudd hove off the lines; and the *Pole Star* slid clear. With her new propeller she was around in a jiffy and five minutes later passed through the rocky portals of Erik Harbor.

The next day a brief stop was made at the stone hut on the other side of the peninsula to take on some of Dr. Barlow's papers and records.

"We must not forget the purpose of the expe-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

dition," he told Rudd. "Despite our haste from now on, there is no reason we cannot make a running survey of the waters through which we shall pass, as well as lay out a route for our next visit to these regions. I have a small pocket dip needle which enables me to take magnetic observations. And with the Captain's sextant we can collect a sufficient number of angles for chart work after we return."

"You are certainly a horse for work!" exclaimed Rudd.

"He sure is!" agreed Norman. "I've felt for a day and a half as if I were attached to a New York hose company and on my way to a fire!"

"You are," put in the Skipper. "A fire and a riot and a lynching—just wait till we get back!" And turning to the Doctor he added, plaintively: "You don't think we can miss it, do you Barlow?"

"Not if our luck holds. We ought to have more wind though. Remember we have been able to take fuel enough to last us only a little more than half way. The sail has got to do the rest."

As if in answer to the Doctor's wish a brisk wind sprang up just as the *Pole Star* entered Victoria Straits. Fortunately the season was an open one. What ice there was could easily be avoided. At once the engine was stopped, the mast unstepped, and the sail spread. As the white sheet filled and bellied, the *Pole Star* leaped ahead as if alive.

THE RACE BEGINS

"Got a bone in her teeth like a torpedo boat!" cried Rudd, admiringly. "Just look at that bow wave!" He was right. The little launch could make splendid time with a quartering breeze and the green water fairly boiled under her neat spoon bow.

Day in and day out for a solid week the strong blustering wind continued out of the north and east. And both day and night the *Pole Star* sped along. No stop was made even for fresh water. The limited quantity in the launch breakers finally had to be rationed out. No stop was made for meat; though seal and walrus were sighted almost hourly on vagrant floes. No stop was made to dry the small crews' dripping garments, soaked by the spray that never ceased to dash over the entire boat; or to dry the cabin's moldy bunks and boxes; or to dry the large case of biscuit which leaked. Its contents were served out by the indomitable Doctor to his companions, who ate the mess with wry faces. Grim determination marked the party's inexorable plan to win. With every advantage on Mr. Menon's side, he still lacked the steely unity of purpose that actuated the five weary but undaunted explorers.

"You never can tell," repeated the Doctor over and over again. "Maybe to-night—maybe to-morrow—this splendid wind will drop. Ice will come.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Then we must lie and wait. Save the seconds, boys!
Save the seconds!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" they muttered through teeth clenched to keep them from chattering. Rudd spun the wheel with knuckles gone white from cold and exertion. Boggs lay a soggy and unconscious form on the lee side, where he sought to make up a bit of sleep after a hard night of steering.

On August 5, the wind dropped to such an extent that use of fuel was justified. "I believe we need a little lightening anyway," declared the Skipper. "And it will give us a chance to clear out the cabin."

But after less than twenty-four hours of calm, the wind came back stronger than ever. Double stays had to be rove off to save the mast from going over the side; and lashings in the deck load had twice to be renewed. The strain on every one was terrible. Though hot tea was served out every watch, but two meals a day could be afforded from the limited amount of provisions on board.

The passage through to Coronation Gulf was choked with ice. Fortunately, however, the previous northerly winds had jammed most of the field to the southward, leaving a narrow lane through which the *Pole Star* dashed as if pursued by all the Eskimo devils in the Northland. Entrance into Coronation Gulf was celebrated by a stop long enough to replenish the exhausted water supply. Norman

THE RACE BEGINS

shot a caribou near by and a good hot meal was served in comfort for the first time since leaving Erik Harbor.

"I am very hopeful," said Dr. Barlow. "Our progress thus far has been little short of miraculous."

"Might do it once in twenty-five years!" grunted the Skipper, who had somewhat objected to the relentless speed with which the launch had been driven.

Boggs shrugged his rheumatic shoulders and announced dejectedly: "We ain't there yet. Many a man what's thought he was safe has been ditched at the tape!"

"Gee, Boggsy," commented Norman, shaking a stripped caribou rib at the fireman, "if you didn't have any troubles you wouldn't know what to do with yourself!"

Most of the way across the gulf fuel was used. Clear water made steering easy, and good time was the result. Rudd here noted a marked change in the land. As the sun had begun to set, due to the more southerly latitude, there was no longer the beautiful midnight colorings of further north. Instead of highlands spread great barren wastes that were not unlike the prairies of western Kansas in winter time.

An ice jam at the exit from the gulf nearly fin-

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

ished the *Pole Star* in one nip. The lead patch Rudd put on when the launch was recovered had to be renewed, and a great deal of water got into the bedding, which had been moved down into the cabin. But many weeks of hardship had numbed the party into calm acceptance of each disaster that overtook it. Without excitement or undue exertion the damage was repaired and the boat driven on her weary way.

Several mornings later Rudd awakened with a queer feeling of giddiness. "Guess this work is beginning to tell on me," was his first thought. Indeed, the weeks of unending toil and exposure had been enough to finish off a less rugged physique than his.

Just then Dr. Barlow stuck his head down the hatch and shouted: "Out, lads, and have a look at the polar sea!" Its swell Rudd had felt.

The *Pole Star* had at last escaped from the perilous mazes of the archipelago and was now entering the final lap of her great race. To the north as far as the eye could reach was open water. Southward lay the low and desolate coast of North America, an awful wilderness of tundra and tangled undergrowth. Stunted trees had begun to show themselves in spots—crippled promises of their taller, stronger brothers further south.

Captain Pike seized the Doctor's hand. "Barlow," he cried, "you're a great man! This means we

THE RACE BEGINS

have come through the Northwest Passage in a single season, something no other living person has ever done. Even Amundsen, its discoverer, had to winter on his way across."

The Doctor laughed. With open sea before them there was no reason in the world, they thought, why the rest of the trip shouldn't be made rapidly and in safety. After rounding Point Barrow the *Pole Star* must surely encounter a Revenue Cutter or a whaler, which would pick them up and take the whole party south. Or, if not, sufficient fuel could be bought at one of the northern trading stations to take them down to Skagway, where the autumn steamer to Seattle could be caught.

"Think of it, Norman," Rudd exclaimed, "we're going to be waiting on the dock when Mr. Menon returns!"

Norman grinned from ear to ear. "I can't bear to think of it," he chuckled, "it nearly busts me wide open with joy!"

Matters continued happily until a few nights later just after Cape Bathurst had been rounded. The wind rose again. But this time, instead of a strong and helping flow of air, came a series of wintry blasts that lashed the sea into enormous combing waves.

"We'll have to heave to," decided the Doctor, to which the Skipper heartily agreed.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

But the shore to the south was a lee shore. It was a scarce ten miles away and offered no shelter along its straight and gravelly beach. A sea anchor was therefore quickly rigged with the spare mast and two oars covered by canvas. With this safety precaution the *Pole Star* rode bow to sea throughout the night.

Norman had just taken the watch at eight next morning when Dr. Barlow seized the Skipper's arm and pointed excitedly to windward. "Ice!" he shouted to make himself heard above the storm.

Sure enough, a horde of small but wicked floes brought down by the gale from the great polar pack was sweeping upon the helpless boat. Within an hour they cut the line to the sea anchor.

"Run for it, Boggs!" yelled the Doctor.

The engine was started and the *Pole Star* turned tail to the host of white devils behind her.

Captain Pike shook his head. "It's the only thing to do, Barlow," he admitted. "Run to the west and escape if we can. But it's a small chance!"

Almost before he finished speaking a low booming of distant surf became audible above the roar of the storm and ice. Closer and closer the little launch was swept, pressed by the pursuing pack. To make matters worse, flurries of snow scudded along with each heavy squall and hid the sea as well as the land. The fury of the gale seemed to redouble with each

THE RACE BEGINS

spasm. Black waves, twice the height of the tiny launch's mast, towered above her. Great ice cakes weighing tons were stood on edge by colossal masses of water.

Suddenly the *Pole Star* careened to port and seemed to rear vertically upon her nose. Crash of timbers told she had struck.

"Jump for it!" screamed some one. The Doctor at the wheel flung himself clear in time to avoid the next mountainous sea, which would have crushed every bone in his body against the wreckage.

Rudd tried desperately to jump, but the wave caught him. He sank with lungs filled to bursting by one last frantic breath. For an eternity he felt himself dragged and tumbled helplessly along in the surf's maelstrom. At last his feet touched bottom. He dug his toes in and fought against the receding flood of waters. A moment later his head and waist were clear. He rose and struggled stumbly toward the beach. Twice more seas engulfed him. But he fought gamely, and in the end fell nearly unconscious with cold and exhaustion upon the barren snow-covered strand. He had not strength to rise, but lay stunned and shivering in the wet slush.

CHAPTER XXVI

MORE SPEED!

“**T***HIS is the end!*” crept into Rudd’s dulled brain. “The others must be in the same fix!”

Dimly he recalled the truth of the Barrens. A thousand miles to the southward they ran: the American counterpart of Siberian Steppes. They formed a desolate land, gutted by the glaciers of long past ages. Only the wolf and the evil raven were at home in its awful loneliness. Nine months of the year it was dead, each stream and spring in the grip of the bitter cold. And the summer was but another form of agony for those who dared to enter.

Rudd tried to close his eyes, but frost had crusted their lids and kept them painfully apart. Again the words throttled his desire to live: “*This is the end!*”

A voice broke through the barrier of roaring wind and pounding surf. It was a strange voice, and it slightly roused the semiconscious boy. But as he drifted off again he felt himself lifted into the air as if by a sea that had overrun the rest.

MORE SPEED!

Almost immediately, so it seemed, he opened his eyes in heaven. At least it was heaven compared to anything he had known for a long time. There was warmth and the fragrance of flapjacks. His body was embedded in soft blankets. Light from a shaded lantern flooded softly the walls about.

"Hello, young fellow! Feeling better!" It was the voice of the beach.

Rudd turned his head weakly. "Why—yes. Where—who——"

The stranger, a hulking, clean-shaven fellow in woolens and coonskin cap, smiled pleasantly. "Now just lie still, old scout, till we get that stomach full; and then we'll talk!"

Rudd lay back with a sigh. Where the others were or how he happened to be here were for the moment problems too great for his strength. Silently he accepted the steaming coffee, a wide plate heaped with beans and molasses, and finally half a dozen six-inch "flaps."

"I'm Matthews," said the stranger suddenly. "Matthews of the Standard Oil Company. We're up for a look around. You know oil has been discovered along the Mackenzie. The rest of the gang are next door in the big tent."

A shadow of pain flickered across Rudd's face.

"Your crowd, too," added Matthews hastily. "That is except——"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Rudd propped himself forward, fear gripping his heart. "Except *whom?*" he shot back.

"Sailorman, I think. Was there a Boggs along?"

Tears came into the boy's eyes. "Boggsy then. Poor, poor old Boggsy! He was always sure he was doomed."

Matthews came over and patted his patient's shoulder. "Never mind, lad. You were lucky to have any one saved. We saw the whole thing. The other three were carried clean above high water mark by that wave which up-ended you. You snagged a line, I guess, and went under. We thought you were a goner. Been twelve hours since you came ashore."

"Twelve hours!" gasped Rudd. "Why, I thought it was just a few minutes ago!"

The tent flap jerked suddenly aside and Dr. Barlow's cheery face came through. "Hello, Rudd! Alive yet?"

"About three quarters, sir!" smiled Rudd, beginning to feel the strong coffee grip his muscle fibers into life.

The Doctor shot a look at Matthews and went on. "Well, hurry up. We've got to leave as soon as possible!"

"Leave!" was the astonished reply. "Why, I thought the *Pole Star* was smashed to kindling!"

"Match-sticks," corrected the Doctor. "But there's

MORE SPEED!

more than one way to skin a cat. And we're going to skin Menon, don't you forget it!"

Rudd looked from one to the other of the laughing faces before him. It didn't seem possible the party could go on after this latest catastrophe. That so many had even survived was certainly all that could reasonably be expected of Fate.

The Doctor seated himself beside the little cot on which Rudd lay. "Matthews is an old friend of mine," he explained. "I have told him about the *Erik*. He thinks he remembers Menon—has something on him nearly as bad as we have. And he's going to help us south. The moment you have the strength we start. Pike and Norman will follow in a few days."

Matthews drew a rolled chart from his kit bag. "Here's northern Canada, Doctor."

"Yes, Rudd, this will show you what we are going to do. We have landed at the western edge of the great delta of the Mackenzie River. Matthews is very kindly lending us two fast canoes with native paddlers to carry us to the oil well just north of Fort Norman. That is nearly four hundred miles south of here, and may take us ten days."

Rudd eyed the vast distances with growing doubt. "But we can't possibly get to any railroad before October!" he groaned.

"Through the generosity of Matthews we can.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

He has two planes at Fort Norman. They are due to leave a week from to-morrow with mail and his reports. They go direct to McMurray, Alberta. There we catch a train for Edmonton. Across Saskatchewan will take another day or so, until we make the Limited for Montreal, and on up to Sydney. I can wire to have the government agents meet me there with a special boat for St. Johns. And, unless Menon pulls off a miracle, we ought to be there first."

Just hearing the details proved as great a stimulant as the coffee. Rudd found he could not stay put. His clothes had been dried. He drew them on with a sense of girding himself for a final dash. That 3,000 miles and more must be covered in the space of a few days detracted not at all from his enthusiasm.

He found the Skipper pulling away at his pipe between snatches of yarns exchanged with a new-found acquaintance. As usual he seemed resigned to his fate, and only occasionally broke out with fiery maledictions when he recalled his First Officer's crimes. Norman was off for caribou, having in no way suffered from his recent ducking.

At dawn the following day two canoes set out, one containing Dr. Barlow, the other Rudd. Thanks to Matthews, the paddlers were the pick of Indian guides. Dr. Barlow's promise of a fat reward if the

MORE SPEED!

plane were caught spurred them on to a great effort. At that they seemed not to hurry, but dipped their paddles with a mechanical regularity of stroke which could be kept up for hours.

The first two days good progress was made; and when the arctic circle was passed just above Fort Good Hope, Rudd felt that he had left the North behind him. But his mistake soon was evident.

Huge black flies and mosquitoes had made the trip intolerable. When a rain set in and discouraged the venomous insects the passengers were accordingly delighted. The Indians, however, shook their heads over the weather and wanted to camp early. Finally, they refused to go any further.

Dr. Barlow argued with them in sign language until his wrists nearly fell off. But to no purpose. The Indians merely shrugged their shoulders, pointing first to the south and then to the sky.

At this moment the puffing of a motor boat came over the river.

"Must be from the fort," was Rudd's first thought. But to his surprise the trim little craft, which was no larger than a whaleboat, proved to hold two Barren Land Eskimos. They also seemed anxious about the weather and headed for the beach some distance down.

Dr. Barlow determined to try them. "You watch

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

our stuff," he told Rudd. "And I'll see if these newcomers will give us a lift."

But before the Doctor returned, the Indians' fears were realized. Wind swept across the broad body of the river and drove the water almost into the little camp. Twice the tent blew down before enough boulders could be gathered to hold it securely.

"No use!" exclaimed the Doctor on his return. His hair spread out in wet black streams down his forehead, and he was panting with the exertion of plowing back against the wind.

Rudd sat moodily on his sleeping bag, which he hated to unroll because of the soaking it was sure to get. "Never mind," said he. "We ought to have learned patience by this time."

A cheerless evening was spent in the cold tent. Sleep was out of the question with the deafening slatting of canvas and the drumming of the rain. Dr. Barlow entertained Rudd with some description of the land they were traversing.

"Do you realize," he asked, "that for one hundred and thirty-two years white men have been traveling this river? It taps more than a million square miles of undeveloped country. Enormous forest reserves, vast lakes filled with fish, untold mineral wealth—all lie within it untouched. And yet to this day there are but a little over two hundred white settlers!"

MORE SPEED!

"But aren't there a good many Indians and Eskimos?"

"Possibly five thousand all told. But think of the immensity of their domain!"

Next morning the Indians refused to go on until they had repaired their canoes which had been damaged by the storm.

"How about the Eskimos?" suggested Rudd.

For reply Dr. Barlow shook his fist at the Indians. "You quitters!" he shouted. "You are just stringing me for more money!" But all he got for his eloquence was a serene shrug of the natives' shoulders.

The Eskimo agreed to return as far as Fort Good Hope with the two explorers. This station was just sixteen miles south of the arctic circle, and was the first touch of civilization Rudd had seen in months. The whitewashed log houses looked very neat and clean, and to his frost-numbed nose proved a fragrant change from the acrid seal stench to which he had become so used.

Dr. Barlow gave the white man in charge no chance to doubt the urgency of their mission. "Every moment counts!" the Doctor shouted at him, punctuating the words by slamming his fist into his open palm. "Matthews is lending us his planes. We have three days to catch them. Name your price and I'll pay it!"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

The man smiled. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "It isn't the money; it's the bare fact that we haven't any boats. All are off fishing. How about the Eskimo who brought you this far?"

"I'll try him."

But pleadings and imprecations proved of no avail. The Eskimo stoutly maintained that his wife and his two children awaited him. Wolves might be at them now. Besides, The Ramparts were dangerous.

"You realize," said the white man, "that just south of here the river narrows from two miles to a few hundred yards. This gorge we call The Ramparts. Its walls rise vertically hundreds of feet. Boatmen fear it."

"How about your steamer?"

"None for a week, and she takes another week to unload."

The Doctor threw up his hands. "Rudd," he groaned despairingly, "luck certainly seems against us this time!"

Rudd's face lengthened perceptibly. If the resourceful Doctor was discouraged, the outlook must be well-nigh hopeless.

"Is there no way?" he cried.

The white man shook his head. "None unless you fly."

MORE SPEED!

A low and distant whine floated down from the sky. All three men whirled as if shot.

"*Magic!*" ejaculated the white man. "Your plane, or I'm a liar!"

Rudd stared with open mouth and squinted eyes. Suddenly, "I see it!" he shouted, and pointed due south into the mist-whitened horizon above the forest.

The plane, which was fitted with pontoons, landed on the river in front of the settlement and taxied ashore. The entire population rushed down to lend a hand dragging it up. The aviator struggled stiffly from his seat and came forward holding out his hand.

"What's up?" asked the white man. "Thought you were bound south."

"I am," was the terse reply. "But the engine's off at End of Steel. No more mail for a month."

"How about the wreckers?"

"They're bogged, too."

Dr. Barlow pressed forward here and asked the fatal question: "Can't we get out with you? I have Mr. Matthews' permission for you to take the two of us to Fort McMurray."

"Glad to," said the aviator. "But what's the use? You can't possibly get beyond McMurray till October, when the first boat goes down."

"But why can't you fly the extra hundred miles to Edmonton?"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

“Can—but no place to land. I’m a water bird, you see. Pontoons don’t take on terra firma.”

The Doctor turned wearily to Rudd. The strain of anxiety and the party’s unbroken series of misfortunes was beginning to tell on him. “We’ve got to get there!” he muttered. “We’ve got to get there! We’ve got——”

“Never mind, sir,” the white man broke in kindly. “Come on in and I’ll give you the best wild goose dinner you ever tasted!”

But the goose stuck in Rudd’s throat. Like the Doctor, but one thought gripped his brain. “*We’ve got to get there!*”

He watched the aviator eat. Somehow the man fascinated him. He and his plane stood for success. How could he be used? Wasn’t there *some* way?

Rudd suddenly laid down his knife and fork and swallowed with a gulp. “Say,” he exclaimed, “suppose we did come down on land?”

The abruptness of his question startled the others into silence. All turned to the aviator who balanced half a boiled potato on his fork.

“What would happen?” said the airman, “why, we’d bust the pontoons to smithereens—maybe the lower wings. I can’t promise we wouldn’t bust ourselves into the bargain.”

“How about that morass near the station?” suggested the white man.

MORE SPEED!

"Would save our necks but not the plane. And they'd have to dig us out, sure as shooting!"

But the more Rudd's question was discussed the more practicable it seemed. Dr. Barlow declared himself willing to sign a voucher covering all damages to plane and driver. "And I'll hang on a bonus for making the train," he added.

Finally the aviator agreed. He wasn't at all enthusiastic, but he agreed, which was all that was necessary.

Though the sun was already north of west it was decided to make the first hop to Fort Norman that afternoon. The plane took the air easily, despite its extra load, and, circling once for altitude, led off swiftly into the south. At a thousand feet Rudd got some idea of the vastness of the wilderness through which their route lay. As far as the eye could reach spread the limitless forest, broken here and there by heathered muskeg or glistening lakes.

Fort Norman proved to be a sort of inhabited mudhole, with the Hudson Bay store flanked by a row of ramshackle Indian log huts. One producing oil well near by had brought considerable activity to the settlement without improving living conditions in the slightest. All night long dogs howled and fought outside. While inside Rudd battled the sleepless hours away with mosquitoes as "large as humming birds" he told the Doctor next morning.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Ensuing days were not unlike those on the *Pole Star* across the top of the world. With a daring that brought Rudd's heart into his mouth time and again the aviator drove his frail machine through wind and clouds. Way stations at intervals of about 300 miles provided fuel. Rest and food were also available at these places. But both passengers were keyed to such a pitch of helpless energy that neither could keep still long enough to eat properly or sleep in peace.

At the last stop before Edmonton, Dr. Barlow inspected the pontoon struts. "We don't want them too strong," he said. "They have got to break our fall when we come down."

"Never fear," laughed the driver. "We'll break everything there is to break when we crash!"

At four the next afternoon the plane encircled the town. It lay spread like a vast hive five hundred feet below. Near one side was visible the rectangular red roof of the railroad station, from which a web of glimmering rails spun southward. Steam plumed from an engine drawn up beside it. A black mass showed where the crowd waited to bid farewell to the passengers.

The Doctor pulled out his watch. The roar of the motor prevented speech. With his finger he indicated that the train left in ten minutes.

Twice the birdman circled. Then he cut the motor

MORE SPEED!

out and dived in a long, gentle sweep. The black earth seemed to rise to meet them. The muddy field on which they had to land lay ahead a hundred feet down. The speed was sickening. Rudd's fingers gripped feverishly a strut near his knee; his heels braced with such intense force they nearly drove through the hull.

Then came a terrific crash, followed by a splintering of wood. The plane's body gave a wild swoop and Rudd felt himself hurled through the air. He turned a full somersault and landed squarely on his shoulders in a mud puddle two feet deep. Four feet away sat the Doctor in a puddle of equal size and muddiness.

A great cheer went up from the crowd. The aviator extricated himself from the wreckage and waved his hat.

"All right!" he yelled. "Nobody hurt!"

The Doctor's splotched face became wreathed in smiles as he struggled from his natural mud bath. "You bet we're all right!" he exclaimed.

"And there's going to be somebody hurt yet! Eh?" shouted Rudd.

"Righto!"

A long drawn cry echoed from the platform: "All Ab—o—a—r—D!"

CHAPTER XXVII

BAFFLED!

RUDD and Dr. Barlow, accompanied by a federal agent and a detective of the Canadian Secret Service, reached St. Johns, Newfoundland, on a crisp morning in late September. The Doctor immediately chartered a cab and gave the driver directions to proceed with all haste to the home of Mr. Dinger, senior member of the firm of Dinger Brothers, Limited.

Bullock Dinger himself met them at the door of his great stone mansion. He looked the part of a shipowner. Indeed, for years he had sailed the seven seas, his own master. Now his stocky frame, wide-spread legs, and broad, gale-cured countenance still marked him a man of seafaring life.

"My friend Barlow!" he cried, and held out both hands.

"The same," returned the Doctor, a little dryly. "I want you to meet Mr. Winters, a member of our expedition as you may recall. These," indicating the agent and the detective, "are Mr. Peel and Mr. Thorpe, friends whom I have taken the liberty of bringing along."

BAFFLED!

"Of course, of course," bowed Mr. Dinger, rubbing his hands. "Now come in, gentlemen. I want to hear more of your wonderful tale."

The Doctor's eyes widened. "More!" he echoed. "You don't mean to say——?"

Mr. Bullock threw open the door of his magnificent library before replying. "I do," said he. "I do mean to say that I know much of your heroism already. Your wire from Montreal was followed in the same hour by Mr. Menon's appearance. You should hear him praise you!"

Dr. Barlow bit his lip. Rudd's face was a study in perplexity. The agent and the detective stood quietly waiting. They knew nothing except that their services might be needed.

With a slight movement of his shoulders the Doctor regained control of himself.

"You say," he went on, "Menon has told you everything?"

"Not me, exactly," admitted Mr. Dinger. "The fact is, I have been too busy to see him yet. But my nephew, young Henry, has brought me a full account."

"Yes?" said the Doctor inquiringly. He recalled that it had been Henry Dinger, the junior member of the firm, who, at the last moment, insisted on Mr. Menon as First Officer of the *Erik*.

"Yes, I had Henry attend to the matter for me.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Seems Menon and his men were picked up by the whaler, *Southern Cross*, after the *Erik* was lost."

"So the *Erik* was lost!" exclaimed the Doctor with an admirable imitation of surprise.

"Yes. That's so, you were marooned before she was driven out by the ice. She got pinched by the main pack and went down in a hundred fathoms of water."

The Doctor turned to Rudd. "Ah!" said he. "Poor old bucket!"

Rudd bit his tongue to keep from grinning. He dared not speak.

"But Caverly?" questioned the Doctor. "Was he—er—saved? That is, did he suffer any?"

Mr. Dinger glared at Rudd. "As I recall," he said slowly, "Reginald Caverly nearly lost his life, due to your young friend Winters here. Winters disliked the lad, didn't he—and actually shot at him?"

Rudd's face flushed a fiery red. But before he could protest the falsehood Dr. Barlow spoke up quickly. "Yes, I believe they did have a little difficulty. But, Dinger, you know what boys are."

"Humph!" grunted the shipowner, and turned to his desk. "While you're here, Barlow, we'd better straighten out the charter. Menon tells me Pike was willing to accompany you through the Northwest

BAFFLED!

Passage. Do you call that a decent way for any Skipper to behave?"

"Possibly," was the even reply. "What else did Menon tell you?"

Mr. Dinger glared savagely at the Doctor. "Quite a little, Barlow. And, much as I hate to admit it, I am a little disappointed in you. Despite Menon's praise, your actions in abandoning the *Erik* without the slightest formality were scarcely commendable."

Dr. Barlow stepped swiftly to the desk behind which Mr. Dinger stood braced and angry. His eyes narrowed and into his voice came a flinty hardness that Rudd recognized as a danger signal.

"Dinger," he said with an effort at self-control, "say all you've got to say, and then let me have a word."

Mr. Dinger was for a moment taken aback. "Do you mean you have another story? Why, Henry's account was certainly an exact repetition of Menon's diary. He said you and Pike left the ship in the launch near Boothia and sent Caverly back with word you would continue west. Menon tried to save the ship and handled her with greatest skill until she got nipped just below Cape Chidley. By luck and courage he managed to get every man to the *Southern Cross*."

"Every man?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, all but your party. Oh, yes, and the young

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Second Officer Norman. Poor fellow, he lost his nerve when the ship entered the ice and tried to escape in the motor boat. He never was seen again. As she was practically without food or fuel, he undoubtedly died of starvation and cold."

Dr. Barlow eyed the fireplace thoughtfully. Then he turned to a chart above the desk. "You say the *Erik* went down at Cape Chidley?" he asked.

"Just below," corrected Mr. Dinger. "Latitude 59° 40'."

"Then there was no chance for insurance."

Mr. Dinger smiled and rubbed his thick hands. "Yes, fortunately, there was. We had her covered by a policy for seventy-five thousand dollars and a rider permitted us to collect anywhere up to 60° north latitude."

A beam of revelation expanded Dr. Barlow's face until it shone. A moment later Rudd caught the point and grinned.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "You get that for the loss of the *Erik*?"

"Yes—that is, not the firm, but my nephew, Henry. As a present on his twenty-fifth birthday I gave him the *Erik's* future profits. By a stroke of fate the firm lost the ship, while Henry won a fortune!"

"Very nice," nodded the Doctor pleasantly. "Now, would it be convenient to meet your nephew and Menon here this morning?"

BAFFLED!

Mr. Dinger's smile of satisfaction faded. "I can't say it would, Barlow. Perhaps at the office later—what's the idea, anyway?"

The Doctor shot a meaning glance at the agent and the detective. "Nothing," he said, "only that this crook Menon has just pulled off one of the greatest hoaxes since Dr. Cook came back!"

"Crook!" shouted Mr. Dinger springing from behind his desk. "I'll have you know he's my nephew's closest friend!"

"Doubtless," said the Doctor with a shrug.

Mr. Dinger paced the room as if he had been a caged tiger. He stopped before the Doctor and shook a thick finger. "You'll pay for this insult, Barlow! I'm going to send for them now!" He seized the telephone.

"Delighted," smiled the Doctor. "Now will you do me one more favor?"

"What?" snorted the wrathful Dinger.

"Let me stand behind yonder door when Menon arrives. Tell him you've heard from me that he fomented mutiny aboard the *Erik* and stole her; and that she didn't sink south of 60°, either!"

Mr. Dinger clenched his fists and opened his mouth to refuse this further insult to his nephew's associate. Then, as if some cleverer move occurred to him, he said: "Very well, Barlow, have your way."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

DURING the ensuing half-hour wait Dr. Barlow steered the conversation into other channels, apparently preferring not to divulge too much of what he knew.

Suddenly a bell jangled in a distant part of the house.

"There they are!" exclaimed Mr. Dinger. Quickly he led the agent and the detective around a decorative screen near the folding doors. Rudd and the Doctor he concealed behind the heavy window hangings.

Came a knock. "Henry?" called the host.

The door opened. In stepped a sleek youngster of Spanish type. "Good morning, Uncle Bullock," said he suavely, his small black eyes furtively searching the room as if he feared others might be present.

"Good morning, Henry. How about Menon?"

At that moment the First Officer appeared. Framed in the doorway, dark garments blending with the shadowed passageway beyond, his evil face stood out with indescribable ugliness. Weather had deep-

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

ened the lines from his beaked nose and seared his treacherous eyes. Grooming had but accentuated the loathsomeness of his hideous features. A sardonic smile glittered on his thin and colorless lips.

With an obsequious bow he advanced. "Good morning, my dear Mr. Dinger."

The old sailor returned the greeting by a stiff nod.

"Uncle Bullock," began the nephew, "we planned to meet you at the office later. Mr. Menon wished to say good-by."

"My house will do as well," Mr. Dinger replied, shortly. And, turning to the First Officer, "Menon," he said, "how about the *Erik*?"

Mr. Menon's smile gave way to a look of cunning. "Didn't your nephew tell you the story?" he asked.

"He did. But the yarn was not wholly connected. Exactly where did the vessel disappear?"

"Just below Cape Chidley, sir; about 59° north. If you'll let me show you on the chart——"

"How did you know you were there? Did you take a sight?"

"No need, sir. We recognized the cape. The Chief will tell you the same—or any of the men."

"The men—was there—er—any difficulty with them?"

Mr. Menon's slightly defensive air became one of self-deprecation. "Really, sir, I don't like to say it, but their loyalty to me has been one of the greatest

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

joys of my life. Few officers could boast of such staunch support as I found among my men!"

"How about the one you lost? Norman—wasn't that his name?"

The First Officer shook his head. "Poor lad—poor, misguided lad! I used every power of persuasion on him; offered him every comfort if he would only see the right. I failed. He stole the launch—mentally unbalanced, no doubt, when he did it. And now his bones lie bleaching on some desolate arctic strand!"

"Are you sure?"

Mr. Menon started and shot a glance at his questioner from beneath his shaggy eyebrows. "Sure, sir? What do you mean?"

Mr. Dinger made a gesture of impatience. "About everything," he exclaimed petulantly. "About the latitude, the men's behavior, Norman's fate?"

"Of course, I am sure! We shall rescue Captain Pike and the others next year. Then you will know. Indeed, I would volunteer to go after my old friend, Dr. Barlow, but I have a splendid offer from Australia and must leave at once."

"Well, Menon, I'm glad you're in a position to prove your assertions for I have received very unpleasant news to the contrary from Dr. Barlow himself."

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

"What!" snapped Mr. Menon. "You don't say he's out already?"

"I didn't say that. I said he had given me news about the expedition. He claims the *Erik* didn't sink where you said she did, and that you instigated trouble among her crew!"

"Oh," said the other in tones vastly relieved. "So he thinks she sunk further north, does he? Well, he wasn't there—how could he tell?"

"I confess, he did not explain how he knew. But what about the men?"

Mr. Menon rubbed his bony hands together and smiled until his black mustache crinkled. "Ah! I have it now. He thinks I was to blame for Caverly's behavior with the *Pole Star*. If I could only see the Doctor and explain! He is such a brave and clever chap! Such skill of organization as he showed! He is a credit to his government. I am tempted to delay my departure to Australia till he returns."

Dr. Barlow stepped from behind the curtain. "Don't trouble yourself, Menon," he said quietly, "I'm right here."

The First Officer fell back a pace in his amazement. His face, naturally pale, took on a grayish hue. His talonlike fingers clutched the back of a chair. "You!" he exclaimed, huskily. "*You!*"

"No other," smiled the Doctor. "Pinch me and see!"

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

Mr. Menon's undisguised emotion held the eyes of all. Henry Dinger drew away as if he had discovered too late his error in associating with such a man. His uncle folded his arms and squared his jaw with condemning firmness.

Suddenly Mr. Menon's whole expression changed. His eyes fired and his lean jaw protruded. Every muscle tautened. "You've tried to trick me!" he shouted, and pointed a trembling finger at Mr. Dinger. "You thought I lied to you and you hid this man to hear what I'd say. Ask your nephew. He'll tell you I told him the same!" With the swiftness of a cornered tiger he spun on the Doctor. "*Prove* it!" he lashed out. "*Prove* your rigamarole about the mutiny and the *Erik* and—and—" He licked his lips. "Did *you* see her go down?" he cried, shrilly.

Dr. Barlow shook his head composedly. "No, I can't say I did."

Mr. Dinger, who had appeared distinctly non-plussed by Mr. Menon's outburst, here broke in with an effort to calm him. "A moment, gentlemen; this is my house."

"Your house," sneered Mr. Menon. "Yes, and I'm your guest! Do you call this treating me as one?"

Mr. Dinger advanced and held out his hand. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "And I want you all to be

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

seated while we talk this thing over quietly. Have a cigar?"

Mr. Menon took one and bit its end with a savage snap of his teeth. "I suppose Dr. Barlow cooked this up, didn't he?"

"Right," said the Doctor. "I had reason to believe some points in your account were not accurate. I thought——"

"There—there!" broke in the host, anxious to make amends. "You admitted you didn't see the *Erik* go down. And you told me you hadn't encountered any other of the ship's company."

Mr. Dinger suddenly remembered Rudd. He turned to Mr. Menon. "Oh, yes," he said with a nervous laugh, "there's another here."

The First Officer's fingers dug into the arm of his chair till its leather creaked. "Where?" he exclaimed.

"Come out here, Winters," called Mr. Dinger. Rudd stepped forth and nodded at Mr. Menon. An ugly glare mingled with relief was the latter's only reply.

Henry Dinger here spoke up. He saw the danger to his friend had momentarily passed. Now was the time to save him. He rose. "Well, Uncle," said he, "guess we'd better be going. Mr. Menon leaves for Halifax at noon where he gets connections to San Francisco."

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

"Fine!" agreed the Uncle, glad to see a way out of the unpleasantness.

The younger man turned to Dr. Barlow. "Pity what the North does to some people," he said, insolently. "While Mr. Menon comes back with nothing but praise for you, you sneak up here behind his back and try to hang him for something you don't know anything about!"

Rudd clenched his fists. His knuckles itched to seat themselves forcibly upon the smug nephew's impertinent chin.

Dr. Barlow scratched his head with one finger. "The trouble is," he said good-humoredly, "I do know something about it. Mr. Menon is a very clever man. His story holds water, as I feared it would. And now it appears he is going to make his getaway."

"Getaway!" snarled the First Officer. And turning to Mr. Dinger, "Are you going to let him continue to insult me in your own house?"

Rudd stepped to the Doctor's side and whispered, "Why not tell them Norman is alive?"

"They would not believe it," he replied in ordinary tones.

"Believe what?" snapped Mr. Dinger.

The Doctor looked at Mr. Menon before he replied: "That your young Second Officer, Norman, is alive and well!"

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

Mr. Menon at this abruptly placed himself in front of Mr. Dinger. His face was livid. "Your house or not, I'm going to assault that lunatic if he goes on with his libel!" he screeched.

Dr. Barlow paid no heed to the fellow's temper. Even Rudd saw that Mr. Dinger was willing to accept almost any explanation to avoid a scene. And, swayed by his nephew's assurances that Mr. Menon was a man of highest character and integrity, he took an air of indulgence towards the Doctor. Perhaps, as Mr. Menon had implied, the hardships of arctic travel had actually unseated the explorer's mind.

This version was strengthened when Dr. Barlow suddenly broke out into a roar of laughter. He had gone over to the window and had been standing there in dejection. Now he faced the others and guffawed till the chandeliers shook. Rudd was terrified. Had his friend's sanity at last given way under the strain?

The Doctor suddenly stopped and gulped. "You said you were to leave for Australia at noon?" he asked of Mr. Menon.

"I do," was the contemptuous reply.

"I wouldn't," said the Doctor. "I'd wait and have a talk with——"

He didn't complete the sentence. A distant bell jangled. Simultaneously came a crash at the front door. Angry words from a butler were followed by thudding footsteps in the hall. Then, to the stunned

THE MYSTERY OF THE ERIK

amazement of every one present, there appeared flushed and panting none other than the person of Norman!

"Norman!" cried Rudd. "Thank God!"

"Righto! I've been right behind you all the way. came on next plane, next train, next boat——!"

At this instant Mr. Menon, who had been crouching near the desk, made a break for the door. Dr. Barlow gave a sharp whistle just as the surprised Norman was bowled over backwards. The agent and the detective sprang from their hiding places. Before the villain had reached the front vestibule they had him down and handcuffed.

The Doctor turned to Mr. Dinger with a smile. "That's the kind of luck we have been having all summer!" he exclaimed. "We've never known till the last instant whether things were going to break right or not!"

"All's well that ends well!" retorted the old seaman, tritely.

Rudd shrugged his thick shoulders and grinned. "But sometimes it's a terrible strain, sir," he added.

(1)

THE END

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